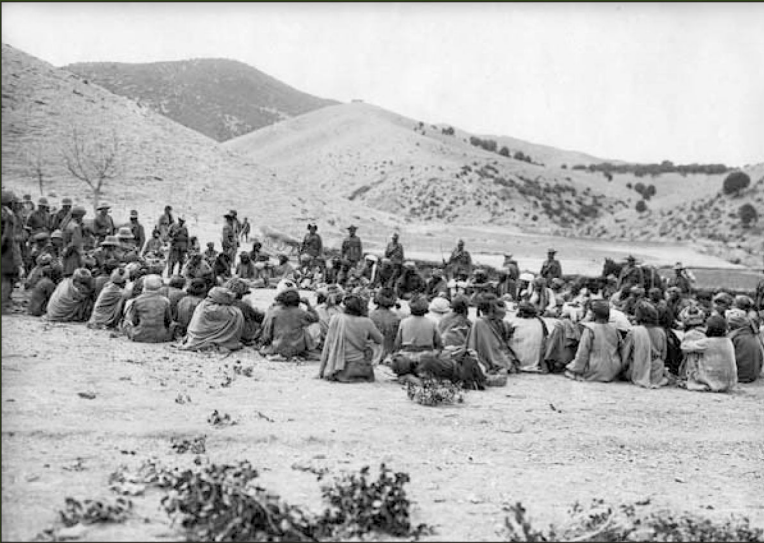


Sumit Guha

Beyond Caste

*Identity and Power in South Asia,
Past and Present*



BRILL

Beyond Caste

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Beyond Caste

Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present

By

Sumit Guha



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*This book is dedicated to the memory of
Mira Guha nee Dutt, 1933–2008*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN REFERENCES

BISM	<i>Bhārata Itihāsa Saṁśodhaka Maṇḍala</i> [Society of researchers in Indian History]
BISMT	<i>Bhārata Itihāsa Saṁśodhaka Maṇḍala Traimāsika</i> [BISM Quarterly]
BL	British Library
MIS	<i>Marāṭhyāncyā Itihāsācī Sādhane</i>
MSA	Maharashtra State Archives
OIOC	Oriental and India Office Collection
PSIH	<i>Persian Sources of Indian History/Aitihāsika Phārsī Sāhitya</i>
SPD	Selections from the Peshwa Daftar
SSRPD	Selections from the Satara Raja's and Peshwa Diaries

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TERMINOLOGY

As this book draws on writings in several languages and the same non-English word may be found in more than one of them, I have tried to minimize the use of diacriticals by using commonly accepted English forms for some proper and common nouns wherever possible in the text: Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujar, Rajput, Brahman, Shivaji, Balaji, Bajirao, Ranjit Singh, for example. The distinction between 'l' and '!' is often capriciously made in the sources, I have omitted the under-dot throughout. I have also generally refrained from re-working names found without diacriticals in the original European-language source. Where an author has a common English rendering of his or her name I have generally used it (as with Rajwade, Sardesai, Gadgil, Kulkarni etc.) except for non-English works in the bibliography. Spellings in quotations from English sources have not been changed; if they are unintelligible, I have added a clarification in square brackets. Modern place-names are generally written as current in South Asian English, except within quotations.

Many caste-names, especially those of Dalit castes, sometimes were and are used as insults. I have generally replaced them with either functional translations or simply "Dalit" or "Dalit caste" in order to avoid such offensive terms. In quotations where these terms occurred in the original English source, I have inserted a more appropriate translation in square brackets.

GLOSSARY

Bhil, Bhilla	Name of a number of tribes and quasi-caste groups in central India
Dalit	Downtrodden, oppressed. Name now current for traditionally lowest-status castes as a whole; groups officially termed "Scheduled Castes" in the Republic of India
<i>deśmukh</i>	Hereditary chief of a large village cluster (<i>pargana q.v.</i>). Equivalent of the <i>pargana caudhuri</i> in north India and the <i>mandloi</i> in central India
<i>deśpāṇḍe</i>	Hereditary registrar of a <i>pargana</i> ; equivalent to the <i>qānūngo</i> in north India
Gūjar	Sometimes Sanskritized to Gurjara. Widespread cluster of peasant castes traditionally associated with pastoral agriculture
Jāt, Jaṭ	Peasant; name collectively applied to families belonging to a cluster of peasant castes found across northern India and Pakistan. May be of any religion
<i>Jāti, jāṭ</i>	Common term for endogamous social group; usually translated as 'caste'. Members could be of any religion
Kāyastha	Scribe; name of cluster of Hindu castes associated with government administration
<i>Khūm</i>	Stable, corporate body of any religion; usually based on descent. Might be occupational and/or endogamous. Derived from <i>qaum</i> (q.v). Also found written as 'kom'
Koli	Name of a caste cluster; in Gujarat associated with small farming and military service; in Maharashtra often fishermen or water-carriers.
Kuṇbī	Farmer; name widely used by various cultivating castes in western India; now dropped by many of them.
Mahār	Caste of village servants, laborers, watchmen and soldiers, in the Marathi-speaking areas of western India; name of an Indian Army regiment raised in 1941
Marāṭhā	A regionally dominant landowning peasant community; speakers of the Marathi language.
<i>nāḍgauḍā</i>	Hereditary <i>pargana</i> chief; equivalent of <i>deśmukh</i>
<i>nāḍkaraṇī</i>	Hereditary <i>pargana</i> record-keeper; equivalent of <i>deśpāṇḍe</i>
Paṭhān	Collective name of a group of tribes on the Afghan-Pakistan border; widely adopted among Indian Muslims. Sometimes a dominant landed elite with some preference for endogamy
<i>Pargana</i>	Village cluster organized as tax-unit with hereditary officials. Sometimes possessing considerable fiscal, judicial and military autonomy
<i>Peśvā</i> /Peshwa	Dynasty of powerful hereditary ministers who became independent sovereigns c. 1750–1818
<i>puḍkā</i>	Small bundle; archival term for a series of papers tied with thread and sorted into <i>rumāl-s</i> (q.v.)

<i>qabīla</i>	Arabic; tribe, in India sometimes also used to mean ‘following’ or ‘retinue’
<i>qaum</i>	Arabic; nation, people, community generically. Widely used in South Asia, for any recognizable ethnic group; see <i>khūm</i>
Rājput/Rajput	Name widely adopted by a cluster of landowning endogamous communities in the northern part of the sub-continent. Both Hindu and Muslim
<i>rumāl</i>	Square cloth; archival term for a large bundle of documents
Saiyid	Honorific Arab title held by those supposedly descended from the Prophet of Islam
<i>varṇa</i>	One of the four ranked maximal social classes in Indic social classification (<i>Śūdra</i> , <i>Vaiśya</i> , <i>Kṣatriya</i> , <i>Brāhmaṇa</i>); sometimes inaccurately referred to as ‘caste’. Each <i>varṇa</i> includes hundreds of endogamous castes—see <i>jāti</i>
<i>ẓāt</i>	Persian; rank, status group; in South Asia used occasionally as a synonym for <i>khūm</i> or <i>jāti</i> ; Mughal officialese denoting statutory official rank
<i>zamīndār</i>	Landowner; in much of South Asia applied only to large landlords but in the North-west to any landholder.

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I have incurred many debts in the five years that it has taken to write this book. I am deeply indebted to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation for awarding me a research fellowship that freed me from other duties and permitted full-time research through 2009.

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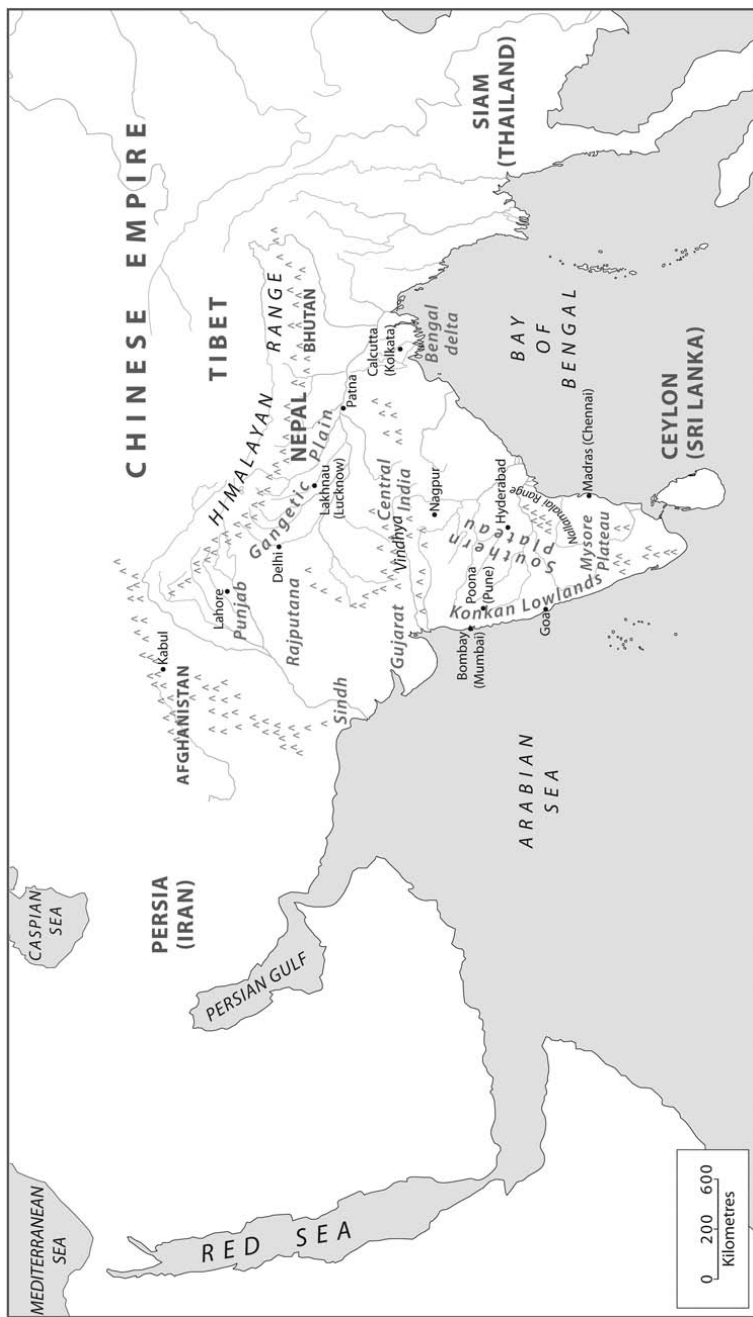
I have also received assistance and support in various forms from many persons. Susan Bayly, David Gilmartin, Dipankar Gupta, Nayanjot Lahiri, Ramya Sreenivasan, Cynthia Talbot and Thomas Trautmann all patiently read parts of a dense and confusing manuscript and did much to help me clarify my thoughts. Ines Zupanov discussed parts of the manuscript and guided me to important sources. Nor should I neglect to mention a positive but penetrating report by an anonymous referee for Brill.

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The cover photo is reproduced courtesy of the Gurkha Museum, Winchester, UK. I am indebted to Gavin Edgerley-Harris of the Museum for his help in this matter.

I have translated all the non-English sources cited in this book and am responsible for errors resulting from that exercise. I also remain completely responsible for any and all defects, especially those caused by my last-minute changes to the text. None of the institutions or persons mentioned above are in any way responsible. Parts of the material included in this book have previously appeared in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 36 No. 1 (1999) (co-authored with Indrani Chatterjee) and Vol. 41 No. 1 (2004). They are included with the permission of the co-author, the copyright holder (The Indian Economic and Social History Association) and Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. Portions of Chapter 5 have appeared in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 45 No. 2 (2003): 148–167. They are included with the permission of the Society for Comparative Study of Society and History.



Map 1. The geographical setting

INTRODUCTION

GOVERNING CASTE: THE STUDY OF STATE POWER AND ETHNIC RANK IN SOUTH ASIA

In May 2012 Surinder S. Jodhka, a leading Indian sociologist, introduced an issue of the important Indian periodical *Seminar*, in which several important scholars assessed the situation of caste today. Jodhka pointed out that the classical concept as formulated by Western Orientalists controls the field by default: much criticized but never replaced. He showed how the ideological (or religious) dimension of caste had dominated academic and popular understanding to the neglect of its political economy. He pointed to the neglect of how caste shaped the economic and political life of the sub-continent and in turn been shaped by “the regional histories of economic and political processes.” And he called for the creation of historically and empirically grounded frameworks through which to understand what had vanished and what remained.¹ This book was nearing completion when I obtained this important publication. But it transpires that I had unwittingly been working to address the historical part of the agenda that Jodhka formulated.

This book has two goals. Its central aim is to present a new, historically informed understanding of the working of South Asian state and society through the past millennium; the secondary one is to provide the basis for a comparative understanding of the long-run processes of ethnic politics in this area as it came to modernity and experienced modern forms of state power. By attaining these goals I hope to enable us to drastically rethink the ‘caste system’—that central trope in the popular and scholarly understandings of the Indian sub-continent through the centuries. I argue that the effort to find a single, unified rationale for the internal workings and external relations of each of thousands of ethnic corporate groups is ultimately futile. We should begin by thinking of this society as being, like any complex civilization, multi-stranded or polyadic. A caste society uniquely knots many strands at the same corporate nexus. But they are distinct

¹ Surinder S. Jodhka, “The Problem,” *Seminar* No. 633 (May 2012): 12–13.

strands nonetheless, as the veteran political scientist Rajni Kothari pointed out in 1970. He observed that change occurred by “picking and choosing” between different elements (what I term strands) that at all times energized the sociopolitical system.² It is hence necessary to start from the common *form* of caste or caste-like bodies—their bounded, corporate character. Then we must look at the processes whereby those boundaries are defined and reproduced through historical time. I will show that the bounded, status-ranked ethnic community or ‘caste’³ is a social form that frequently appears in multi-ethnic societies. But in South Asia it became a highly involuted, politicized form of ethnic ranking shaped by the constant exercise of socio-economic power. Furthermore, rank-boundary enforcement in South Asia also meshed with another socio-economically important institution: the occupational guild—a feature noted in many societies from early times. Additionally, it knotted into kinship and marriage strategies. Finally, caste entwined with another common form of cultural ordering—that of purity, pollution and danger, which gave it what may be loosely termed its ‘religious’ dimension.⁴ Rules about purity and propriety have long characterized human society. They have often been used to mark crucial social boundaries—typically between major religious communities as well as between men and women, priests and laypersons and so on.⁵ As Marion Katz points out, that the law of purity also defines community boundaries is “always *one* of the meanings of the law.”⁶ These purity markers were especially elaborate in South Asia, but it is a mistake to focus on the *markers* of

² Rajni Kothari, Introduction to *Caste in Indian Politics*, Kothari ed. (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1970), 7–8. A new edition of this classic work has appeared with the addition of a valuable Prologue by James Manor (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010), i–lxi.

³ Chapter 1 will present a full-length discussion and definition of caste and tribe; the preceding phrase offers a minimal working definition.

⁴ Mary C. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concept of Pollution and Taboo with a new preface by the author* (London: Routledge, 2003), e-book esp. Chapter 7; Jonathan Klawans, “Rethinking Leviticus and Rereading *Purity and Danger*,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* vol. 27, 1 (2003): 89–101; Al-Ghazzali, *The Mysteries of Purity*, trans. Nabi Amin Faris (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, [1966] reprint 1980). Marion H. Katz, *Body of Text: The Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).

⁵ George Forster’s memoir of his solo journey across West Asia from India to Astrakhan in 1782–1783 has left abundant evidence of touch pollution of food and water associated with stigmatized Christian outsiders across this region. George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England through the Northern Part of India, Kashmire, Afghanistan. Persia and into Russia by the Caspian-Sea* 2 volumes (London: R. Faulder, Vol. 1, 1798; Vol. 2, 1808), 2: 104, 106–107, 120–122, 132–134; twentieth-century evidence is in Vartan Gregorian, *The Road to Home: My Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 40.

⁶ Katz, *Body of Text*, 205; Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 157.

social boundaries and ignore the *powers* that enforced them. As the important sociologist G.S. Ghurye commented, it was the “ubiquity and strangeness” of caste that drew foreigners to its study.⁷ Not surprisingly, they did not, with rare exceptions like the Jesuit Roberto Nobili (who was in south India 1606 to 1656) seek to understand it in terms of the European order of ranks, lineages and estates; rather its fascination lay in its exotic or benighted traits.⁸ But any of the above-mentioned strands can be untied or cut and yet the structure will continue to bind and constrain life-chances and life-choices. This perspective also allows us to understand how the increasingly evident disregard for ritual purity in South Asian society has not led to the end of the system as such.⁹

This systemic redundancy or summation of roles is why we can find ‘caste-like’ features in a range of societies. It is also why the network may survive the removal of one or more of the sources that powered it. Indeed new power-sources can run the old apparatus for other purposes—nowadays, increasingly for electoral and political ones. As van der Veer commented in 1993, this is a process in which “communal identities are infused with new meanings.”¹⁰ But as Kothari and his colleagues reminded us in 1970, caste was *always* political. Yet this less exotic aspect of it has received scant attention. So we need to do what Kothari proposed: develop an empirical understanding which “could give us a reasonable model of social dynamics.”¹¹ Dynamic processes must unfold through time and space. Deploying Kothari’s idea then allows us to address the whole sweep of such defined bodies across religions and through centuries of historical time down to the present. Secondly, it allows us to accommodate the evident regional diversity of the Indian subcontinent. As Thomas Trautmann (building on an idea from M.B. Emeneau) pointed out, Indian civilization was shaped

⁷ J.H. Hutton, *Caste in India: Its Nature, Function, and Origins* 3rd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 111–114; G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* 5th ed. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1969), 1–2.

⁸ Roberto Nobili “Memorandum,” printed in *Le Mission du Maduré d’après des documents inédits* vol. II, ed. J. Bertrand (Paris: Imprimerie de Poussielgue, 1848), 160–170.

⁹ For a subtle and telling analysis of the different valence of beef-eating by Westerners and by Muslims for Hindus in India, see Dipankar Gupta, *The Caged Phoenix: Can India Fly?* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press, 2009), 207–208.

¹⁰ Peter van der Veer, “The Foreign Hand: Orientalist Discourse in Sociology and Communalism,” *Orientalism and the Post-colonial Predicament*, eds. Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 38. I have taken several important ideas from this paper.

¹¹ Kothari, Introduction, 7–8.



Map 2. Countries in the South Asian Area Regional Cooperation Council and state boundaries in India and Pakistan

by melding very different linguistic and cultural zones that nonetheless retained their distinctness in key areas like kinship and language.¹² But such melding has continued throughout South Asian history to the present. We may trace major cultural phenomena that have spread from limited areas through the region and beyond. The Vedic sacrifice, and the religions of renunciation that rejected it, originated in the North-west and North-east respectively but then went on to shape the wider Indic world; *bhakti* devotion was born in the South and profoundly changed the Indo-Gangetic plains centuries later. Two salient sociopolitical phenomena of the twentieth century—the non-Brahman movement and Muslim nationalism—were similarly regionally limited at the outset but then spread through decades to shape the entire subcontinent. Ranking systems based on gendered ideologies of honor and shame extend from the Mediterranean basin to India.¹³ A snapshot at any point in time therefore will capture developing and decaying structures of social life spread out across South Asia. Some practices may lose their momentum before they reach every region while others may decay in their place of origin but thrive in other settings. That is how dynamic processes develop. Furthermore, some processes may never reach completion, being overtaken by the backwash of others or indeed by phenomena such as colonization and globalization, Anglicization or Americanization. That means that some structures will never appear in every region. Through all this, however, I argue that the bounded ethnic group remained and remains a powerful presence across the whole of South Asia.

This view of South Asian caste systems makes the analysis increasingly relevant to the present-day world. Since the demise of the USSR, the different economic and political trajectories of its constituent and satellite states have stimulated greater interest in the ways in which states are embedded in and emerge from civil societies. It is now widely recognized that the politicization of ethnic identities has played an important part in determining these trajectories. There is also greater awareness that the problem is not confined to South Asia or indeed the developing world. The new awareness may be demonstrated in the work of a leading political scientist, Donald Horowitz. In 1985, he published a massive comparative study of ethnic conflicts worldwide. A few European cases were considered, but he saw the rise

¹² Thomas R. Trautmann, "Introduction," in *The Aryan Debate*, ed. Trautmann (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), xxv.

¹³ Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status," in *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. J.G. Peristiany (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 21–77.

of ethnic conflict largely as an accompaniment to “the decline of democracy in Asia and Africa.” That repeated a complacent orthodoxy that went back to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who was working in Indonesia in the late 1950s.¹⁴ But events in the next decade forced Horowitz to reconsider. When he wrote a preface to a second edition that appeared in the aftermath of the Bosnian war, the growing ostracism of the Roma people, and lesser episodes of ethnic cleansing in the former Soviet Union, it was impossible exclude the West from his purview. Group loyalty, he wrote in shock, had again revealed its murderous aspect “in the heartland of Europe, a half century after Hitler.”¹⁵ Ethnic and national sentiment was now a source of conflict and concern worldwide.

The population movements of our times have also intensified academic and policy concerns about the interactions of states and ethnic communities not only in Africa and Asia but even in the European heartlands of the liberal nation-state. The communication revolution—especially the World Wide Web—ensures that diverse populations need no longer participate in a common national mass culture determined by geography and a state-run education system. Hence Horowitz remarked that what the Bosnian conflict did from ‘outside’ liberal Europe, growing pluralism did from the inside—they both forced a reexamination of the issues of ethnicity and ethnic conflict.¹⁶ This, indeed, seems to be developing into a pattern characteristic of a contemporary world in the throes of unprecedented demographic differentials and massive migration flows. The first chapter of a symposium on the massive Los Angeles riots of 1992 (which claimed over fifty lives and millions of dollars in property), for example, began its exploration by noting that Los Angeles county had no majority ethnic group. Instead, it was a mosaic of numerous small groups clustered residentially, “often in neighborhoods that adjoin ethnically different territory.”¹⁷ These groups also had, and have, unequal social and political endowments and economic niches: implicit or

¹⁴ See Clifford Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution,” in *Old Societies and New States*, ed. Geertz (New York: Free Press, 1963), 109–111, for the argument that in “modern” i.e. Western societies calls to “blood and land” had been transcended by civil sentiments.

¹⁵ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* second edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), xvii, xi for the two quotes.

¹⁶ Horowitz, Preface to the Second Edition, xi; the question of transnational processes is analyzed in Partha Chatterjee, “Beyond the Nation? Or within?” *Social Text* no. 56 (1998): 57–69.

¹⁷ Peter S. Morrison and Ira S. Lowry, “A Riot of Color: The Demographic Setting,” in *The Los Angeles Riots: Lessons for the Urban Future*, ed. Mark Baldassare (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 19–46, 44–45.

explicit ranking is inherent in such a position. Thus, as the world confronts the challenges of the twenty-first century, “primordial” identities¹⁸ that once seemed obsolete grow increasingly important to the life of humanity.

Regardless of whether this is deemed cause for concern or celebration, it is clear that all sizeable political communities will be multicultural and multiethnic in the decades to come. This realization is increasingly reflected in academic thought. So Thomas Eriksen’s recent scholarly survey pointed out how the term “ethnic” has risen in academic popularity. This he attributes to the global changes touched on above and to a mutation in “the dominant way of thinking in anthropology.” Research subjects that could once feasibly be imagined as isolated “tribes” are now clearly “ethnic minorities.”¹⁹ At the same time, the study of such communities is no longer a concern of anthropologists alone, but is addressed from various perspectives by archaeologists, political scientists, sociologists, and social psychologists, among others. Obviously, too, since we are speaking of stable groups that have sometimes reproduced themselves over centuries, their study is a natural domain of historians. Let me now move to the question of whether the concept of caste as a highly involuted and politicized form of ethnic ranking, which I propose to deploy, remains valid today.

*The Social Organization of Culture Difference:
Fredrik Barth after Fifty Years*

The disciplinary move from the structural-functional study of the “isolated” tribe to the analysis of interacting ethnic groups noted by Thomas Eriksen, was pioneered in the 1950s by the political anthropologist Fredrik Barth working in the western borderlands of the Indian subcontinent. His mature formulation of the issues came in his penetrating introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* in 1969.²⁰ As his ideas form the starting point of this book, I will briefly review their status after half a century of active debate and scrutiny. It appears that they have stood up well to many unforeseen developments in world affairs. Thus a major symposium in 1993 concluded

¹⁸ Geertz, “The Integrative Revolution,” 109, popularized this term. He wrote “the new states are abnormally susceptible to serious disaffection based on primordial attachments.”

¹⁹ Thomas H. Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism* second edition (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 8–9.

²⁰ Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (reprint Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998). See his “Preface” to the 1998 edition, 5–7 and “Introduction”, 9–38.

that the central tenets of Barth's formulation "were clearly formulated and still stand."²¹ Looking back in 1997, the social anthropologist Richard Jenkins similarly acknowledged that Barth's model was the most systematic, most securely grounded in wider theoretical arguments, and certainly the most influential of all the theories of ethnicity. He noted some theoretical oversights that stemmed from aspects of social anthropology as a discipline, especially its search for integration and consensus.²² Even that critique, however, seems more applicable to the structural-functional school that Barth replaced than to Barth himself. Hence Eriksen's scholarly survey of ethnicity and nationalism commented that it was due to Barth that ethnicity itself has come to be understood as "developed in mutual contact rather than in isolation."²³ Or as Barth had himself put it, ethnic distinctions are "often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built."²⁴

It is more than fifty years since Barth's study of Pathan and Baluch tribal communities in the largely ungoverned northwest of Pakistan led him to the important axiom that ethnic separation is a continuing process rather than an unchallenged inheritance. The sociocultural boundary between groups named Pathan and Baluch was maintained regardless of the movement of individuals, families, or even entire tribal segments from one identity to the other.²⁵ This insight (as Jenkins points out) decisively displaced the idea that culture was "a reified entity, 'above' the fray of daily life, which somehow produces behaviour." Instead (he continues) most social anthropologists came to agree that ethnicity is contextually variable and "externalized in social interaction and internalized in personal self-identification."²⁶

The major challenge to what I may call the 'boundaries paradigm of ethnicity' came from those who argued that it neglected both the inequalities of power and the tenacity of cultural values in human life. As a consequence of the first, they argued, the formulation was both instrumentalist and vol-

²¹ Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers, eds., *The Anthropology of Ethnicity beyond 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries'* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis fourth edition, 2000), 1.

²² Richard Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 12–13. Jenkins then goes on to review various critiques before observing that none of them point to any inherent or irretrievable flaw in the paradigm; *ibid.*, 22.

²³ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11.

²⁴ Barth, Introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 10.

²⁵ Barth sets forth his model in the Introduction to the edited volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. For a discussion of the core elements of the concept, see also John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, eds., *Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Editors' Introduction, 6–7.

²⁶ Jenkins, *Rethinking Ethnicity*, 12–14.

untarist in its understanding of human action: as one such critic put it, “choice is assumed to be the crucial social fact.”²⁷ This is certainly not true of Barth, who saw both ecological and political constraints as constantly limiting choices open to individuals and groups.²⁸ He went further: the persistence of stratified polyethnic systems *depends* on an unequal distribution of assets. Such social hierarchies, he points out, can only be maintained in the long run by state controls (as in South African apartheid), or by differences in evaluation that direct members of different groups into specific channels, such as systems with polluting occupations or those with cultural differences that “generate marked differences in political organization, economic organization, or individual skills.” It is obvious that if ethnicity is related to sociopolitical power (as I also argue), using power to foreclose the options of subordinated groups is the central method of constructing that social hierarchy.²⁹ Various devices can then mark the boundaries in different societies—restrictions on commensality or conjugality, on dress or comportment or residence, speech variants, and so on. To explain social exclusion by the existence of the ‘boundary marker’ itself is to confuse the relation between label and content. Ideas of purity may be less significant aspects of social inequality for some groups than others, as van der Veer pointed out in 1993. In the interaction of diverse groups, they are fitted into larger structures “expressive of dominance and centrality, honor and shame”—hierarchical values independent of purity.³⁰ As we shall see below, the coercive enrollment of distinct ethnic groups into a hierarchy of power is exactly how Max Weber, one of the founders of modern sociological thought, visualized a caste system taking shape.

Nor should this be surprising. Social power must be unequally distributed to be exercised and an ethnically divided society will almost certainly be characterized by inequality of power between groups. At this point, I should pause to enlarge the working definition of two terms that I will often use in this book, ‘caste’ and ‘ethnic group’. I cannot, I think, do better than to

²⁷ Peter Worsley, cited in Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 56.

²⁸ Fredrik Barth: “The caste system defines clusters of such statuses and one particular cluster is *imposed* on all individual members of each particular caste.” “The System of Social Stratification in Swat, North Pakistan”, 113; emphasis added. Barth’s paper appeared in Edmund R. Leach, ed. *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-West Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965). See also Barth’s 1969 Introduction that identified coercion as compressing *pariah* groups into their social roles, 30–31.

²⁹ Barth, Introduction, 28.

³⁰ Van der Veer, “The Foreign Hand: Orientalist Discourse in Sociology and Communalism,” 34–35.

draw on the anthropologist McKim Marriott. He defined a caste as an ethnic group within a larger society, one which tended to marry endogamously and be ranked relative to others. Such an ethnic group (which included Hindu and Muslim castes and 'tribes') was hereditary in membership and generally recognized as distinctive. Explaining his refusal to exclude what Western anthropology had termed 'tribes', Marriott pointed out that "indigenous terms for 'caste' and 'tribe' are frequently interchangeable or identical." He added that in some cases, tribes had become castes.³¹ Marriott's argument has recently been reconfirmed by a large, collaborative trans-national research project sponsored by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies that covered Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.³²

Drawing a rigid distinction between caste, tribe and ethnic group would ignore the extent to which rankings on Weberian lines emerge in contemporary society, with cultural difference being used to generate social rank. The major distinction that leaps to mind, of course, is that ethnic groups are often conceived as being parallel societies, while caste groups are supposed to be explicitly ranked. That was why Horowitz's study of ethnic conflicts explicitly excluded "ranked" systems from the domain of the ethnic. "Ethnic" in his definition applies to a community that could, if necessary, sustain a complete division of labor within its own ranks.³³ If we apply that definition, however, few such separate but equal communities have ever shared a common territory. Even those consciously founded as pure communities, like the Israeli Yishuv before 1948, have come to need outside workers who have been integrated with a socially differentiated (usually inferior) status.³⁴ Regardless of its beginnings, the resulting community may then begin to resemble Max Weber's classic definition of how stable ethnic stratification approximates caste:

³¹ McKim Marriott, *Caste Ranking and Social Structure in Five Regions of India and Pakistan* (Poona: Deccan College, 1965), 2–3.

³² Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, (no author), *Regional Information and Research Project on Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia*, Delhi (2008); downloaded January 9, 2012, from http://www.dalitssouthasia.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=59&Itemid=11.

A summary of the findings was published by Surinder S. Jodhka and Ghanshyam Shah, "Comparative Contexts of Discrimination: Caste and Untouchability in South Asia," *Economic and Political Weekly* vol. 45, No. 48 (November 27, 2010): 99–106.

³³ Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 53.

³⁴ A recent incident revealed the startling fact that the greenhouses of southern Israel are staffed by Thai contract laborers, for instance: Fares Akram and Isabel Kershner, "Gaza Rocket Attack into Israel Kills a Thai Worker," *New York Times*, March 18, 2010, accessed March 19, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/19/world/middleeast/19gaza.html?fta=y>.

A status segregation grown into a 'caste' differs in its structure from a more 'ethnic' segregation: the caste structure transforms the horizontal and unconnected coexistences of ethnically segregated groups into a vertical social system of super- and subordination.³⁵

We should note that for Weber it was subordination (status-ranking) that maintained the hierarchy, not ethnic or cultural differences between the groups in question. This provides a strong logical basis for examining caste systems as a special sub-set of ethnic hierarchies, and a number of social scientists working on India have, in fact, done so. Kanchan Chandra, for example, has produced a subtle analysis built upon Barth's concept of "cultural differentiae" to understand political competition in India today.³⁶

The second critique of the boundaries paradigm was that extreme Barthians would deny culture any role; that is that they would ignore the importance of early socialization, the transmission of knowledge and skills within social groups, and the importance of language and religion for identity and a sense of community.³⁷ This is certainly applicable to those political scientists whose models are built on the assumption of societies composed solely of rationally expectant, self-interested, maximizing individuals. But as Mancur Olson established fifty years ago, collective action is rarely possible in settings populated by such hyper-rational individuals. Free-riding—consuming a resource without paying for it—is almost always the best strategy in such conditions, except in the case of small, face-to-face groups.³⁸ That would ensure inertia at a societal level. Yet even a minimal knowledge of the contemporary world would convince one that is not the case: large-scale, self-sacrificing collective action does occur. When it does, it is organized around symbols that serve to differentiate and mobilize. Symbolic action or ritual, as the social anthropologist Abner Cohen has observed, is

³⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 2 vols., II: 933–934.

³⁶ Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Headcounts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37, 95. 'Cultural differentiae' refers to cultural features that serve to mark boundaries between groups which then act together for purposes unrelated to the markers in question. Others who have fruitfully deployed the concept of ethnic politics include Steven Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³⁷ Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 57.

³⁸ Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), esp. Chapters I and II. He concludes: "the rational individual in the large group in a socio-political context will not be willing to make any sacrifices to achieve the objectives he shares with others," 166, emphasis mine.

not the product of spontaneous individual creativity; rather it is the collective representation of the group. Cohen early argued for an integration of the symbolic into the political: “man is two-dimensional.”³⁹ That is indubitable: the “political organization of culture difference” depends on there being culture difference to begin with. Nor can either identity or difference be expressed save through symbols. Hence the integration of symbolic action and instrumental politics is unquestionably necessary to understand any social history; they do not exclude each other.

Not all instrumental action is political. Instrumental action obviously includes economic life and economic divisions are part of the historical structure of the caste system. Economic life may be understood in the substantive sense of humans’ interchange with their “natural and social environment” as it supplies the “means of material want satisfaction.”⁴⁰ In every sizeable society, such interchange is organized through a complex division of labor. In South Asia, many specialized occupational groups were also (but not always) closed endogamous communities or castes segmented by various affiliations. So as late as 1900 in Bombay, a Khatri convert to Islam was received into “the Rangari [dyer’s] Jamat, a Bhatia into the Khoja and a Lohana in the Memon” community.⁴¹ One cannot therefore rethink ‘caste’ without rethinking its role in the economic system too.

Seeing symbolic action as a structuring element in social order has been an important current in the anthropological analysis of caste ordering. This goes back A.M. Hocart’s idea that caste was “liturgical”, that the caste order is concerned with the affirmation of ranked identities in the setting of public ritual performance.⁴² But although it may be true that groups that

³⁹ Abner Cohen, *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 5, xi.

⁴⁰ This definition of the ‘substantive’ economy is from Karl Polanyi, “The Economy as an Instituted Process” [1957], reprinted in Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, eds. *The Sociology of Economic Life* second ed. (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 2001), 31.

⁴¹ Stephen M. Edwardes and James M. Campbell, *The Gazetteer of Bombay City and Island*. 2 volumes. (Bombay: The Times Press for the Government of Bombay, 1909), I: 180. There was thus a matching Muslim ‘caste’ for each Hindu one, at least among business communities.

⁴² The most complete and wide-ranging statement of this is Arthur M. Hocart, *Caste: A Comparative Study* [1950], reprint (London: Russell and Russell, 1968). Hocart in fact saw the *origin* of caste in the sacrificial rites inherited from ancient times. Originally a feature of kingly style, it was emulated in rustic settings where the ability to command ceremonial service evidenced status, as Marriott has pointed out (*Village India*, 190). Later scholars have emphasized the integrative role of liturgical performance in temple worship. The idea has been developed for southern India by Arjun Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict Under Colonial*

removed dangerous pollution in the ritual setting also did so in everyday life, substantive economic life needed many other specialists. In many parts of India, specialist families of all kinds entered into durable relationships with their clients, who could be either sets of households or entire villages. (This will be developed in Chapter 3.) These relationships had elements of what Hocart called liturgical service, but also of hard bargaining and coercion. But coercion would only be needed where the acceptance of inferiority was challenged.⁴³ We shall see in Chapter 3 that the coercive imposition of economic *and* ceremonial roles is never far from the scene in such settings.⁴⁴ Socioeconomic and honorific rank feed into each other.

Thus even outside the Hocartian setting of religious performance, groups seeking to alter their *own* symbolic practice have been visited with violence from dominant groups, exactly conforming to van der Veer's ideas as to how regimes of honor are expressed. South Indian Kallars who prevented local Adi-Dravidas from using sandals, long waist-cloths, or umbrellas *anywhere* were concerned with retaining these honorific appurtenances for themselves. They were honorific because they were controlled. Their universal use would of course, strip them of any significance.⁴⁵ This is an exact example of what Richard Jenkins has called a claim to ethnic identity "validated by an audience of 'outsiders' or 'others.'" ⁴⁶ The dominance of the shod is visible through the presence of the barefoot. The same point was made by

Rule: A South Indian Case (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South India 1700–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

⁴³ As one of India's most experienced sociologists, Dipankar Gupta has frequently pointed out. Gupta, "Introduction: The Certitudes of Caste When Identity Trumps Hierarchy," in *Caste in Question: Identity or Hierarchy*, Gupta ed. (Delhi: Sage Publication, 2004), xii–xiii. Also Gupta, *The Caged Phoenix: Can India Fly?* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press & Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 158–164.

⁴⁴ See for example, the Government of Bombay's findings in 1928 on the use of economic power and direct violence against the lower castes at the time. Chairman: O.H.B. Starte, *Report of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1928), 57–58. The famous Dalit leader B.R. Ambedkar was a member and cited this report in his evidence to Round Table Conference in 1930; the evidence is excerpted in Cyril H. Philips, ed., *The Evolution of India and Pakistan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 262–266.

⁴⁵ Van der Veer writes that honor and shame work to structure intragroup and intergroup relations among Hindus and Muslims alike. Van der Veer, "The Foreign Hand", 35; the obvious parallel is to Mediterranean society: Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honor and Social Status", 21–77; also Hutton, *Caste in India*, 205–207.

⁴⁶ Richard Jenkins, "Rethinking Ethnicity: Identity, Categorization and Power," in *Race and Ethnicity: Comparative and Historical Approaches*, eds. John Stone and Dennis Rutledge (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 59–71, 66.

Abner Cohen with regard to caste groups within the Indian village. Once society is differentiated by the division of labor (he wrote), different groups will tend to have “different styles of life and different ideologies.”⁴⁷ In any pre-modern society, identity was publicly signaled by personal dress and adornment. This can be observed in the work of James Wales, a painter who accompanied an English embassy to the Maratha court in the late eighteenth century and was in the region for nearly five years. A ‘realistic’ artist, he took great pains to get the details of costume and appearance right. He early noted that the style of turban was an immediate indicator of caste and regional affiliation.⁴⁸ British rule made enforcement of such codes more difficult as new fashions of clothing and norms of conduct were introduced, and by the 1880s, the feminist Tarabai Shinde satirically bemoaned the visual confusion that resulted.

But now you see ranks of such turbans wherever you look, and half-jackets and coats, and watches with swinging chains. So how can you tell who a man is? If you look down, he has trousers on his legs, and boots and stockings. Is he a Muslim, or a Parsi, or some Sahib's cook?⁴⁹

The coexistence of various identities and diverse values (in South Asia or elsewhere) inevitably also generates contests over public space and social norms relating to such matters as gender roles, food taboos, architecture, and dress styles.⁵⁰ These come to be seen as distinguishing markers. The resolution of such conflicts is ultimately determined by power relations between the groups in question. When there are several competing groups, the concentration of power by one of them replicates on a larger scale what Indian sociologists have called caste dominance.⁵¹ Power relations may also create marginal and excluded groups. In Yemen, for example, the duty of removing filth from cities and towns was imposed as collective burden on the Jewish community from medieval times to 1949. A section of that community was then paid by the others to perform this unpleasant task. Its

⁴⁷ Cohen, *Two-Dimensional Man*, 86.

⁴⁸ Journal of James Wales, vol. 1, entry 24, August 1792, now in the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven. Not surprisingly, Indians then classed Europeans as a whole by their strange head-gear—they were “hat-wearers”.

⁴⁹ Tarabai Shinde, *A Comparison between Men and Women: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India*, trans. Rosalind O'Hanlon (Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2000), 95.

⁵⁰ We may instance the long-standing ban on cow-slaughter in most Indian states, the Swiss minaret referendum or recent French legislation on the full-face veil as an example.

⁵¹ A term coined by M.N. Srinivas, “The Dominant Caste in Rampura,” *American Anthropologist* vol. 61 no. 1, (1959): 1–16, to describe how a land-controlling caste group could control local life regardless of formal law or even its prescribed status in the caste system.

members were, as a consequence, excluded from intermarriage and collective worship with other Jews: they were effectively deemed untouchable. If aggrieved, the scavengers might sometimes leave the town in protest, at which point the Muslim majority would require the remaining Jews to fulfill the communal responsibility imposed on them.⁵² As the Indian sociologist Ghurye remarked in 1969, “special rights for the higher class and disabilities for the lower ones was an almost universal feature of any class society—but the extensive societal application of the requirements of ceremonial purity to this was the peculiarity of the Hindu system.”⁵³ It is widely evident, however, that the increasing contemporary neglect of purity taboos has not meant the end of social boundaries in South Asian society.⁵⁴

So far I have largely discussed power in general terms. But power in recent centuries has been gradually concentrated in the state, so we need to understand the South Asian state as a societally important institution. In general (as we shall see in Chapter 1) much influential scholarship has seen the Islamic conquests as having severed the bonds between society and state. This point of view follows from the interpretation of caste as a product of religious values, quite detached from political power. In relation to Indian culture, this in turn grows out of the unsustainable model of ‘Oriental despotism’, where king and subject were alien to each other, bound together only by force.

In fact, in both the premodern and modern world, marked and bounded entities have continually collided with each other in the course of political, economic, and environmental upheavals. The boundaries and membership of these entities could not remain unaffected. How did this impact the working of states and markets? And how did that affect the constitution and reproduction of states themselves? An adequate understanding of South Asian society requires us not only to bring the state back in; it must bring non-Hindus back in, too. Otherwise, we not only risk historical error but also encourage a politics that sees non-Hindus as alien to Indian society. So we need to study the maintenance and reproduction of *all* sociopolitically relevant boundaries that defined South Asian society, regardless of whether

⁵² Yehuda Nini, *The Jews of Yemen 1800–1914*, trans. from Hebrew by H. Galai (Chur, CH: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 23–25; in 1949 the townspeople of the Yemeni city of Sana’a sought to prevent the departure of the scavenger caste when the other Jews were evacuated to Israel; *ibid.*

⁵³ G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, 179–180.

⁵⁴ See Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*; Gupta, *Caged Phoenix*, 207 has a vivid and telling example; see also p. 211, n. 3.

the “cultural stuff”⁵⁵ within them is labeled Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Beni-Israel, Parsi, Mappilla, Pathan, Rajput, Firangi, Anglo-Indian, or something else.

There have been deep investigations of contemporary Indian politics by Kanchan Chandra, Dipankar Gupta, Christophe Jaffrelot, Rajni Kothari, Suzanne and Lloyd Rudolph, Ghanshyam Shah, A.M. Shah, Steven Wilkinson,⁵⁶ and many others, yet there has generally speaking (with notable exceptions) been an assumed disjuncture between late colonial and independent India, on the one hand, and the long precolonial life of “traditional” society.⁵⁷ The former is assumed to have been radically transformed by the encounter with the dominant West, producing a drastically new wine in old bottles or, as the Rudolphs famously formulated it, the modernity of tradition. Even more dramatic representations have depicted key social institutions—such as the caste system—as essentially generated in the colonial period. This book challenges such ideas. It aims to demonstrate that many of the sociopolitical power relations evident in modern interethnic, including “communal”, relationships also operated in the historical past, and that such an approach allows us to develop a better, more comprehensive understanding of both the Indian subcontinent’s present and its millennial past. As a historian, I direct myself centrally to the latter, though recent history may also be invoked, especially when needed to elucidate or exemplify social processes obscurely represented in the surviving evidence. Finally, I should clarify that this work is most emphatically not a history of anthropological or sociological thought, nor does it seek to present a total explanation of the sociocultural life of the subcontinent.

To anticipate the rest of this book, Chapter 1 develops the theme of how “caste” came to be the master key to understanding South Asian society, starting from the coinage of the term “casta” by the Iberians in sixteenth-century Asia and America. Chapter 2 suggests that imperial kingship at the beginning of the second millennium CE dealt with strong local organizations of councils of dominant peasants or tribes that controlled the countryside. These locally dominant groups enforced hierarchy by direct action. A layer of supra-local gentry began to develop out of their organizations. Gradually, the diffusion of military technology and the entry of new elites intensi-

⁵⁵ The phrase is, of course, from Barth who wrote that the “critical focus of investigation ... becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses.” Barth, “Introduction,” 15.

⁵⁶ Complete references will be found in the bibliography.

⁵⁷ Rajni Kothari, A.M. Shah, Andre Beteille are among the exceptions to this generalization.

fied political competition at all levels. This meant that yet closer links began to be forged between fortress-based commanders of the early ‘gunpowder empires’ and the factious gentry of the countryside. Kingdoms had to cope with and exploit these processes of intrigue and faction (*fitna*).⁵⁸ Royal officials everywhere became increasingly involved in processes of social definition and control. This also meant intervening in and exploiting conflicts that originated in the structures of households and communities. Parallel to such penetration of society by the state, community elites increasingly sought to manipulate, utilize, and control royal power in their own interest.⁵⁹ All this meant that the early modern epoch from about 1600 CE saw an intensification of political and military competition, with an accompanying explosion in record keeping and monetization across South Asia. The old social autonomy of the village cluster (defined in Chapter 2) began to break down amid factional conflict, state interference, and community struggle.

By the eighteenth century, military-fiscal states began digging ever deeper in the effort to extract money and loyalty. Those processes deeply altered the dynamics of what have been thought of as primordial entities—the village community and the family. Each of these is the theme of a chapter (3 and 4). The successful management of men and money generated a new, far-reaching information order needed by the military-political economy of power. Corporate groups of heterogeneous origins were hammered into socio-political formations by the ferocious struggles of the age. Their internal principles became more diverse, their external boundaries more important. But information and communication also reshaped the working of social groups, states and markets. Boundary maintenance is shaped by social knowledge; the colonial regime dramatically enlarged the scope of the latter (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6 we will see how the East India Company government strategically deployed racial corporate identity to build its own state. All these processes culminated in the “mature” colonial regime that took shape by the last decades of the nineteenth century and faced the challenge of nationalism immediately thereafter. That situation in turn was the basis

⁵⁸ The pejorative Arabic term *fitna* (sedition) was used in a neutral, descriptive sense in Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarāj* (Hyderabad: Indian Edition Orient Longmans, 1986). While he may have applied it too widely and given it an excessively ‘cultural’ nature, yet the term captures an essential element in the politics of the early modern era and is still relevant at the present day.

⁵⁹ Gijs Kruijtzer, *Xenophobia in Seventeenth Century India* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), especially Chapters 2 and 6.

for a new, large-scale politics of identity operating at a much higher level as a consequence of the communications revolution that gradually overtook the subcontinent in the twentieth century. Competitive electoral politics intensified these processes. As van der Veer pointed out in 1993, in these processes “public symbols and communal identities are infused with new meanings.”⁶⁰ Many macro-identities contested the political space of twentieth-century South Asia. But caste identity and hierarchy were still strongly present in all the five South Asian countries surveyed by Shah and Jodhka in 2004.⁶¹ That is where I start a long-period historical approach to answer a question posed by the political scientist Rajni Kothari: how do the structures of caste enter into the political process and how does it affect them?⁶²

⁶⁰ Van der Veer, “The Foreign Hand”, 38.

⁶¹ Jodhka and Shah, “Comparative Contexts of Discrimination: Caste and Untouchability in South Asia”.

⁶² Kothari, “Introduction”, 7.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BIRTH OF CASTE

When thinking of India, it is hard not to think of caste.

– Nicholas Dirks, 2001

'Caste' as the Master Key to Understanding India

Dirks wrote in 2001 that in both comparative sociology and common parlance, caste had become a “central symbol for India, indexing it as fundamentally different from other places as well as expressing its essence.”¹ This chapter will trace how that came about. Let us begin with the anthropologist Morton Klass’s penetrating comment that there is no exact equivalent of the word “caste” in Indian languages; English borrowed it from Portuguese in the same way as it borrowed “taboo” from Polynesian. He points out that there were possible English equivalents, such as people, race, nation, tribe, clan, and ethnic group, any of which could all have been used to translate *jāti*; or that term might itself have been adopted, as many other Indic terms have been.² Ultimately, however, the Portuguese term prevailed. Once chosen, it was reinserted in translations of earlier terminology—as for example, the Greco-Roman writer Arrian’s citation (c. 180 CE) of Megasthenes’ reports from India.³

Klass also made another important point: early Europeans immediately moved from the *observed* norm of community endogamy to an inferred motive—preserving “purity of blood.” He noted that this inference said more about the early modern West than about India, where purity was seen as much wider than merely “pure descent.” The term “caste” thus mingled

¹ Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* Indian edition (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 3, for both quotes.

² Morton Klass, *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System* second edition [1993] (Delhi: Manohar, 1998), 25–26; many other names were in fact employed before the Indological need to have a unique label prevailed: see citations in p. 28, note 32 and p. 30, note 40.

³ Klass, *Caste*, 22.

emerging European notions of 'racial' purity with Hindu notions of religious purity (which however also included ideas of contamination of bodily substance).⁴ It then created categories such as 'half-caste' which were meaningless within a *jāti-varṇa* system. At the practical level of governance however, the Portuguese and early western regimes managed Asian society through community organizations and used the *casta/gente* label indiscriminately for both Hindu and non-Hindu communities.⁵ In that respect, they were following local statecraft, which similarly dealt with bounded communities for various purposes. In the twentieth century these structures lost much of their operational significance for the state. It was then that academic theorists cut off the non-Hindu communities and moved increasingly toward a 'religious values' definition of 'caste'. That in turn, has been challenged by scholars from several disciplines as they sought to grasp the actual workings of an old and complex society. Successive sections of this chapter will elaborate each of these arguments.

Names and Things, or Who Invented 'Caste'?

Soon after the early Portuguese conquests in Asian waters, their tongue became a major lingua franca in the Asian seas.⁶ Late-coming European powers contested Portuguese empire but still adopted the Portuguese language for navigational, business, and geographical knowledge. Portuguese speakers were important as interpreters, sailors, soldiers, clerks, concubines, and wives in the entourages of their rivals for a century or more.⁷ The English successor regime to Portuguese dominance drew heavily on Indo-Portuguese personnel and traditions, especially coastal India where they succeeded the Portuguese as the dominant naval power.⁸ The same applied

⁴ Klass, *Caste*, 28–30.

⁵ As early as 1640, the Dutch in the Malukas (Indonesia) referred to their soldiers as having wives belonging to the Portuguese 'casta'. David Lopes, *Expansao da Lingua Portuguesa no Oriente durante os seculos XVI, XVII e XVIII* second edition, edited with a Preface and Notes by Luis de Matos (Porto: Portucalense Editora, 1969), 104.

⁶ A valuable account of this phenomenon with a large anthology of citations from original sources is to be found in Lopes, *Expansao da Lingua Portuguesa*. In the early eighteenth century it was commonly used by northern Europeans not merely to communicate with Asians and Africans but even across different European communities; see Lopes, *ibid.*, 70, 74–77, 85.

⁷ Michael N. Pearson, *The Portuguese in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 103.

⁸ Nearly seventy years after the island was ceded to the English Crown, the headmen of the various Hindu communities still reported their findings to the Court in Bombay "in the

to the Dutch in Sri Lanka. Given this long predominance of Portuguese as the language through which Westerners came to know India, we need then to examine how the Portuguese used *casta*—a term they coined that, as Dirks noted, has now come to be seen as the master key to unlocking the Indian world.

The two Iberian kingdoms of Spain and Portugal pioneered European overseas expansion and initiated the Atlantic slave trade in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In 1494, with papal endorsement, they divided the non-Christian world between them. Personnel and ideas of statecraft moved readily between them—nor should we forget that the two were united under a single monarch from 1580 to 1640. The Iberian regimes drew upon the naval and military traditions of the Mediterranean, which they spread worldwide. Personnel moved from Goa to Brazil and vice versa, for example.⁹

Given their prominence as embattled frontier states of Latin Christianity and their pioneering role in the Atlantic slave trade, it is not surprising that Spain and Portugal were also in the forefront of the development of racial ideologies in the West. Charles Boxer commented:

Attitudes and convictions formed as the Iberian mariners, missionaries and men-at-arms spread around the globe lasted for centuries, and are still with us in varying degrees. Race prejudice and black slavery were for centuries inseparable.¹⁰

More recently, Francisco Bethencourt cites evidence on how race came to be equated with caste with the connotation of stained descent from Jews, Moors, or black people.¹¹ The earliest instance of biological racism in the Christian West was the concept of *limpieza de sangre* or purity of blood, which was initially deployed in Spain against Jewish and Muslim converts to Christianity. The early confluence of an alien ethnicity with religion was shown by the use of the ethnonym 'Moro' for Muslims wherever found, from Spain to the Philippines, India, and beyond. Equally, Muslims and

Portuguese Language" and so the Court had to wait till the depositions were translated. BL OIOC, Bombay Records, P/416/103, fo. 196, Sitting of 15th August 1730.

⁹ Philomena S. Anthony, *The Goa-Bahia Relations 1675–1825* (Kannur: Institute for Research in Social Studies and Humanities, 2004).

¹⁰ A compact summary of his decades of research is in Charles R. Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion 1440–1770* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), Chapter 1; quote from 1.

¹¹ Francisco Bethencourt, Introduction to *Racism and Ethnic Relations in the Portuguese-Speaking World* ed. F. Bethencourt and Adrian Pearce (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–2.

black Africans were systematically cast as evil and inferior respectively.¹² Genealogical descent and religious purity came to be inextricably tangled. As Maria Martinez describes it, by the mid-sixteenth century

the ideology of purity of blood had produced a Spanish society obsessed with genealogy and in particular with the idea that having only Christian ancestors, and thus a 'pure lineage' was the critical sign of a person's loyalty to the faith. Descent and religion—'blood' and faith—were the two foundations of that ideology.¹³

Casta was initially a collective noun that referred to a pure blood-line or species. When applied to humans, it alluded to a system of social order centered on biological parenthood in which "reproducing the pure and noble group was mainly predicated on maintaining the chastity of its women." It was deployed as a category by the sixteenth-century Iberian pioneers of globalization to describe what they perceived as various biologically distinctive (and ranked) social groups generated by Western expansion in the Americas and Asia. In an unconscious parallel to Indic *jāti*, certain occupations were deemed to 'stain' the character of the practitioner and his descendants. These included executioner and tanner—obviously because both carried the pollution of death. Such also were the major concerns of the Indian caste system, though in it fear of the contamination of body substance by impure food or touch was much more prominent. Following the overseas expansion of Iberian empires, the term *casta* increasingly applied to people of mixed descent and so acquired negative connotations. It however "remained distinct from, and more central than the concept of *raza* which ... became closely tied to religion and in particular to Jewish and Muslim descent."¹⁴

Albums depicting the typical physiognomy and dress of particular castes or descent groups were compiled in the Spanish Americas well into the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Eighteenth-century Spanish American legislation pro-

¹² Alice Cruz, "Between the Moor and the African: Purity and Impurity in the Earliest Portuguese Renaissance Chronicles," *Portuguese Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2009): 7–29.

¹³ Maria Elena Martinez, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion and Gender in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1 and *passim*.

¹⁴ Maria Elena Martinez, "The Language, Genealogy and Classification of 'Race' in Colonial Mexico," in *Race and Classification: The Case of Mexican America*, eds. Ilona Katzew and Susan Deans-Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25–42, quote from 30. For the use of *race* to describe descent groups see pp. 28–30 above; Sumit Guha, "Lower Strata, Older Races and Aboriginal Peoples: Racial Anthropology and Mythic History Past and Present" *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, 2 (1998): 425, n. 1.

¹⁵ A specimen from early seventeenth-century Portuguese India is described by Georg

hibited intermarriage between high and low-status groups, or what the Sanskrit law books would have called *varṇa-saṁkara* (mixing of the castes), though it nonetheless occurred. Thus the Portuguese, who introduced later-coming Europeans to Indian society, were evolving a system of ethnic and social stratification by biological ancestry; it was for this reason that they immediately assumed that Indian *jātis* aimed exclusively at maintaining 'purity of blood'. The early response was, however, not to attack caste but to reduce most features of it to a concern of civil society, external to the faith (*adiaphora*). Converts of different castes were thus permitted separate churches.¹⁶ Indeed, Nobili approvingly quoted a Brahman convert who responded to critics who declared that Nobili's color was testimony to his being a despicable 'prangui'.

You reproach the saniassi [Nobili] with being a vile Prangui [Westerner] and cite his color as proof. ... by that argument I prove that you are a [Dalit caste-name]. You are black, [Dalits] are black so you are therefore a [Dalit caste-name]. What! Can you not conceive that in another country where all men, brahmans and [Dalits] alike are white, there will be among the whites the same distinction of castes, the same distinction between nobles and commoners? Everyone applauded this reply, which was as substantive as it was spirited.¹⁷

The logical conclusion of this was of course for Nobili to adopt the guise and habits of a south Indian Brahman in order to gain status and spread his faith. This step gave rise to the long-lasting 'Malabar rites' controversy that finally ended with the rejection of Nobili's strategy.¹⁸ Such mimesis was a reaction to the many-stranded patterns of the Indian system that proved such an annoying obstacle to proselytization. Nobili and like-minded clerics hoped to replace one strand of the knot with submission to their church while leaving much else undisturbed. The Augustinian priest Santucci reported from Bengal, for instance, that so strong was the abhorrence

Schurhammer, "Desenhos Orientais do Tempo de S. Francisco Xavier," in *Orientalia-II: Gesamelte Studien* (Roma: Institutum Historicum Societate Iesu, 1963), 111–120; the entire album was annotated and printed in Luis de Matos, *Imagens do Oriente no século XVI* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional—Casa da Moeda, 1985). The paintings are ordered by geography from the Red Sea, around the coast of India to China and Japan.

¹⁶ According to Nobili an established practice by 1615. J.P. Bertrand ed., *La Mission de Maduré d'après des documents inédits: tome II* (Paris: The editor, 1848), 158.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 31–32.

¹⁸ Ines G. Zupanov, *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); see especially Chapter 1 'Disputed Customs'; Nobili's own argument is in many documents in *La Mission de Maduré, tome II*.

felt for those who had lost caste that even their closest relatives would not eat or drink with them, nor could they enter their houses; so much so that (he claimed) Brahmans would sell even their own sons and daughters for little or nothing if they became polluted in some disastrous way.

And among the Hindus (*gentios*) of Bengal caste is the same as religion, and it is impossible to convince them that changing one does not change the other; an erroneous opinion is current among the new Christians who live among the Hindus (*gentios*) who, when they learn that someone has changed religion and no longer worships idols, say that he has become a *franguy* [Portuguese or Westerner] and lost his caste whereupon he would ordinarily say that this was not so, that he was a *gentio* like the rest, such is the fear they have of being put out of caste.¹⁹

Given the immense importance of 'blood' and skin tone among the Iberians, it is not surprising that the Roman Catholic Church was entirely comfortable with both caste segregation and racial prejudice among its flock.²⁰ Indeed, they may have spread the latter further through periodic inquisitions into alleged crypto-Judaic practices among the recent converts known as New Christians in Europe. *Casta* was deployed in various inventive ways by the Iberian intelligentsia in Asia. Sometimes it is evident that they displaced their own prejudices onto Asians in order to advance agendas of racial exclusion. As early as 1563, de Quadros, the Jesuit provincial in India, was writing to his superiors that they should not send black people (*jente preta*) such as mulattos and the others known as *mistiços* (mixed race) whom it was troublesome to have in the Jesuit Company because "in these parts it [the Company] follows the customs and usages of this land."²¹ An Italian priest likewise cited (a probably fabricated) local sentiment to recommend the exclusion of men of Jewish descent from the Order.²² The idea of bounded, normatively endogamous groups based on biological (or 'blood') descent

¹⁹ Letter of Father Antonio Santucci to Father Fernao de Queyro, 3 January 1683 published in *O Chronista de Tissuary* 1, no. 12 (December, 1866), 9–10.

²⁰ Pearson, *The Portuguese in India*, 101–106. St Francis Xavier exerted himself to make Portuguese men abandon concubines who were "dark in colour and ugly featured" and marry lighter-skinned ex-Muslim slave-women. Cited in *ibid*.

²¹ P.A. de Quadros, Letter of 8 December 1563, in *Documenta Indica* vol. VI, 74, ed. Joseph Wicki. In fact while color prejudice was present among the Iranian immigrant nobles in the Deccan sultanates, it never prevented men of African descent from rising in office and command. See Richard M. Eaton, *A Social History of the Deccan 1300–1761* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chapter 5.

²² Alberto Laerto to Aquaviva, 3 November 1581 in *Documenta Indica*, vol. XV, 368, ed. Wicki, I suggest is fabricated because no Asian could have differentiated a Jesuit of Jewish descent from any other unless informed by the latter's 'pure-blooded' brothers in Christ.

was thus added to the chaotic mix of social categories in southern Asia in the sixteenth century. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Goan Christian castes arguing over precedence were developing rival narratives of pure and noble descent.²³ Some groups managed higher status in both the Indian and Iberian systems. So, as Susan Bayly points out, the Christianity of the Syrians acted as a tradition that conformed and enhanced the group's dual status as warriors and persons of high ceremonial rank among both Malayalis and Portuguese. This claim to be ancient Christians—more ancient indeed than the Iberians—worked to enhance their standing with the Portuguese.

Their position in Malayali society was maintained at least into the nineteenth century through the redistribution of royal 'honours' [by the king of Travancore]; it was not until their links with the state were severed that they became a separate community, increasingly placed outside Kerala's high caste martial tradition.

Likewise, Bayly's case study of the Parava fisher caste provides an example of caste formation around a central body of Christian symbols that transformed the group's ideology but held them within the broader system of ranking in Tamil society. Although they were Christian, the Paravas' relations to Hindu rulers and to lower caste servants and agricultural groups (she writes) "were similar to those of many formally Hindu and Muslim commercial and artisan populations."²⁴ Here, therefore, the Church achieved its goal—the Christianization of a population whose socio-political life did not concern them. It was quite prepared to accept distinctions of race and caste as long people submitted to its authority and exactions, licit and illicit.

*Jāt, Qaum, Qabīla, Zāt, Khūm, Jñāt, Casta:
The Confluence of Categories*

The new racialized categories generated by the Portuguese and variously used by later Westerners were only one grid among multiple classifications that already ran through Asian societies in the early modern era. Rigid

²³ Angela Barreto Xavier, *A Invencao de Goa* (Lisboa: Impresa de Ciencias Sociais, 2008), Chap. 7.

²⁴ Both quotations are from Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900*, 378.

birth-derived categories and even ideas of mental and physical traits associated with them had long been current in West and South Asia. The arrival of Islam supplemented but did not displace them. The widely-revered Muslim saint Nizamuddin Awliya believed that a true descendant of the Prophet exhibited his descent in his conduct and appearance from infancy. Two anecdotes he narrated illustrate this belief. A son was born to a servant in an Alavi theologian's house. The woman identified one of the Alavis as the father. When the boy was four or five he misbehaved: this demonstrated to the pious Sayyad (and Nizamuddin's) satisfaction that he could not be of Alavi descent. Threatened with death, the woman recanted and confessed that another slave was the father. Another story also confirmed that piety was genetic. An Alavi couple had a son born under the sign of an evil star. They gave him away to a 'sweeper.' When he was four or five, he showed such 'beauty and radiance' that the parents took him back.²⁵ We may note how an Indic contempt for scavengers and the idea of inherited qualities marked in the body are both exhibited in this pious anecdote. These also went back some two thousand years in the Indian subcontinent.²⁶ Thus the subcontinent already had social classifications that included the idea of innate qualities founded on descent.

Most people, then as now, had multiple identities, and different ones might be foregrounded in different settings. The maximal communities were, broadly speaking, religious—Muslim and non-Muslim ('Hindu'). But other sociopolitical groupings were also known. Important early Marathi texts used the name *Marāṣṭa* (later *Maratha*) for both language and ethnic group in western India as early as 1290. When the learned Arab traveler Ibn Battuta traveled through region a few decades later, he remarked that it was the territory of the tribe or *qabīla* of Marhatta. The nobles among them, he was told, were termed *Barahame* and *Khattare*—obviously a reference to Brahman and Kshatriya *varṇas*.²⁷ Here then, we find Ibn Battuta

²⁵ Bruce B. Lawrence, trans., *Nizam ad-Din Awliya: Morals for the Heart* with an Introduction by Khaliq A. Nizami (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 352–353. The conversation occurred in 1320.

²⁶ Suvira Jaiswal, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change* (Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 15–18; Ramsharan Sharma, *Śūdras in Ancient India: A Social History of the Lower Order down to circa A.D. 600* third Revised ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1990); for contemporary Islamic countries see Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, *Caste-based Discrimination in South Asia*, 52–53.

²⁷ C. Defremery and B.R. Sanguinetti, eds., *Voyages d'Ibn Batoutah: Texte Arabe accompagné d'une Traduction* Tome Quatrième (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889), 48; 51 adds that nobles among them were 'al-barahama' and 'khattare'.

viewing this region as analogous to the tribal territories of his North African homeland, each of which was dominated by one tribe which would also be internally divided by rank.

The aggressive entry of the Portuguese in Asia later introduced Christians or Firangis as a conspicuous maximal grouping.²⁸ Three maximal identities are neatly juxtaposed in a 1583 inscription from the southern town of Hukkeri, then under the rule of the Adilshahi sultanate (c. 1500–1687). It contained the imprecation that any Muslim who violated the grant would be deemed to have become Christian (*naṣrānī*), and any *kāfir* (evidently meaning Hindu) violator would be deemed to have killed and eaten a cow in Banaras-Kāśī and also engaged in illicit sexual activity there (one assumes not simultaneously). But the inscription also listed functional caste-groups who were seen as hereditary components of the township community.²⁹ Here we have in fact an example of the segments, Hindu and Muslim alike, that constituted the local community gathered under official direction to ratify the grant—in short, a Persian lithic record of the south Indian ‘*got-sabhā*’ or county assembly, meeting as it had done for centuries and was to do for another 200 years. (We shall return to this in Chapter 2).

Resuming our argument: by the sixteenth century, however, Mughal administrative usage popularized the term *qaum* for ascriptive communities, especially dominant groups. Thus the *Ain-i Akbari* listed the *aqwām* (plural of *qaum*) of the gentry in different administrative units of the empire, regardless of religious affiliation. This is much like Ibn Battuta’s fourteenth-century usage of *qabileh* for regional gentry. But *qaum* did not only refer to landowning, that is, territorially delimited, communities, as *qabileh* did. Militiamen from the Sahyadri Mountains that parallel the west coast of India, locally known as Mavali, were extensively recruited during the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb’s (r. 1658–1707) long campaigns in southern India. We find the term *qaum* used to distinguish infantry of that community.³⁰ The term persisted through the eighteenth century: a Persian newsletter from Delhi reported in 1764 that the Afghan king Ahmed Shah had set off

²⁸ For richly documented survey of these categories through some five centuries, see A.R. Kulkarni, “Social Relations in the Maratha Country,” reprinted in *Medieval Maharashtra*, Kulkarni (New Delhi: Books and Books, 1996), 109–161.

²⁹ “Mahdar from Hukkeri in Karnataka,” in *Epigraphia Indica: Arabic & Persian Supplement*, ed. A.A. Kadirī (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1972), 59.

³⁰ “Ain-i Akbari,” cited in Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556–1707* revised edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 198–201; “Newsletter from the Mughal court, January 18, 1685,” in *PSIH Part VI*, ed. Ganesh H. Khare (Pune: BISM, 1973), 354.

from Peshawar toward Kabul but the *qaum* of the Yusufzai (a well-known Afghan “tribe” today) had closed the Khyber Pass against him.³¹

In western India, the word *qaum* entered Marathi officialese in the form *khūm* to denominate various communities including both caste and religious groups, or indeed immigrants who might be lumped together into a generic category like *khūm pardesī* (literally ‘foreigner’). This remained the preferred term in official records such as tax and house-lists into the nineteenth century, despite the extensive Sanskritization of ritual life that the later Peśvas tried to effect. We should not, however, fixate on names: the same word could have distinct meanings, and different names could be applied to the same object.³² This could vary even within the single province of Panjab, as Denzil Ibbetson noted in 1883: “In the east, *qaum* is used for religion and *zāt* for caste; in the west *qaum* for caste, *zāt* for tribe or clan.”³³ The Hindi-language report on the Jodhpur State³⁴ census of 1891 preferred *kaum* for maximal caste-cluster and *khāñp* for the individual clans or groups composing it. The ethnological volume opens with “Rajputs are a famous *kaum*,” and then lists ten major subdivisions such as Rathod, Sisodiya, and so on as *khāñps* of that set. Cultivating communities were listed as “farming” *kaum*. Muslims were classified under the same broad status and occupational categories as other inhabitants.³⁵ Haridayal Singh, the compiler of the report,

³¹ Ganesh H. Khare, ed., PSIH vol. V, Part 1 (Poona: BISM, 1961), 105.

³² In the 1870s the British administration of Panjab sought to compile a code of the customary laws of different communities and faced the problem of translation. Charles L. Tupper compiled guidelines that demonstrate the variability of terminology. “Generally, *zāt* or *kaum* would be translated ‘race’ or ‘tribe’; and *got*, ‘tribe’ or ‘clan’ according to circumstances. ... Thus we should have the Massozai section of the Zāimusht tribe of the Aghán or Pathán race, the Mazari tribe of the Beloch race ... The Jāts might be a race ... This phraseology would not properly apply to all groups of the population. Rājput̃s and Brāhmans are broken up into numerous tribes, but it would scarcely be correct to speak of the Brāhman race, or the Rājput race, as a whole. I think in these two instances the word caste may safely be used without much danger of confusion. We might talk, therefore, of the Ghāzi section of the Bhatti tribe of the Rājput̃ race (Sialkot District).” *Punjab Customary Law* III (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1881), 4.

³³ Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes: Being a Reprint of the Chapter on ‘The Races, Castes and Tribes of the People’ in the Report on the Census of the Panjab Published in 1883* (Reprint Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2001), 31. I am indebted to Brian Caton for drawing my attention to this important work. Note that Ibbetson and Tupper used the accent marker to indicate long vowels.

³⁴ Now merged in the Indian state of Rajasthan.

³⁵ *Riport̃ Mardumśumārī Rāj Mārwaḍ san 1891 Īsvī* [1894] reprint (Sri Jagdiś Simha Gahlot Śodha Saṁsthāna, 1997) 2, 80 and *passim*. I am indebted to Professor Dilbagh Singh for a photocopy of this rare text.

clearly shared Ibbetson's experience of social classification. Ibbetson wrote that his "tribes and castes" included bodies constituted on very different principles.

There is the true caste in the Brahminical sense of the term, the Brahman, Rajput, Banya and so forth; the tribe or race based upon common blood, such as the Pathan, Biloch, Kathia; there is the colony of foreigners like the Purbi [Easterner] and Kashmiri, or of believers in a strange creed like the Bishnoi; there is the true occupational caste such as the [barber], the [leather-worker], and the [scavenger]; there is the common trades-guild ...; there is the occupation pure and simple ...; there is the ascetic order as the Gosain and Nirmala; and besides these there are all possible intermediate stages.³⁶

Qaum was, as Brian Caton has established, widely used in an indigenous history from the 1850s to label political units. So "it could describe many, if not all, of the units of political organization" in Panjab.³⁷ We see, therefore, that the idea of a bounded community as a unit of social, political, and administrative life was indiscriminately applied across religious boundaries to the end of the nineteenth century, and *qaum* and its derivatives were the most common label used for such communities in indigenous discourse.

Meanwhile *casta*, "cast," and "caste" were predominantly, but not exclusively, used by Europeans of various nationalities for the same phenomenon. For example, in 1630 the Conde de Linhares wrote to the King of Portugal about a great officer of the Mughals named "Dulatecan" of "*casta abexim*" (Abyssinian caste).³⁸ We should note that while *casta* was the predominant term employed for such groups, it was not invariably used. For example, in 1730, representatives of three *nações* (cognate to English "nation") gathered to submit a petition to the king of Portugal. The communities were, in fact, the (castes of) Brahmans, Vania merchants, and goldsmiths (*Ourives*).³⁹ Early colonial ethnography also freely used "race" and "tribe" to label these

³⁶ Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, 13–14. Baluch and Pathan are of course major ethnic divisions in the populations of the Suleiman range, along the Afghan-Pakistan border. 'Kathia' were a pastoral and dominant community in western Gujarat and eastern Sindh. I have inserted occupational caste names in square brackets for clarity.

³⁷ Caton, "Social Categories and Colonization in Punjab 1870–1920," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 41 no. 1, (2004), 37–38.

³⁸ Pandouranga S.S. Pissurlencar, *Agentes da Diplomacia Portuguesa na Índia (Hindus, Muçulmanos, Judeus e Parses)* (Bastora: Tipografia Rangel, 1952), 31.

³⁹ J.H. da Cunha Rivara, *Arquivo Português-Oriental* Fascicle 6, second supplement (reprint, Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1992), 371. I found this valuable document via the citation by Conlon, *Caste in a Changing World*, 30.

entities.⁴⁰ In his Latin writings, the learned Nobili used 'gradus' to translate *varṇa*, 'ordo' for *jāti* and 'stirpe' for Sanskrit *kula*.⁴¹ It is impossible to find a single internal principle of cohesion other than community recognition to define membership of such groups.

Political Power, Civil Society, and the Caste Order

Tracing these categories does not tell us, however, why so many states learned and deployed them. Before becoming census commissioner, Ibbetson spent several years as settlement officer of an East Panjab district. This meant that he had to deal with issues of ownership (which involves marriage, inheritance, and partition, among other things), village management, claims to usufruct and access, and so on. It was with this experience behind him that he wrote that, in the eastern Panjab,

conversion has absolutely *no* effect upon the caste of the convert. The Musalman Rajput, Gujar, or Jat is for all social, tribal, political, and administrative purposes exactly as much a Rajput, Gujar or Jat as his Hindu brother.⁴²

What then were the 'political and administrative purposes' to which Ibbetson alluded? Among modern scholars it was Susan Bayly who made the radical advance of showing how caste organization could be an instrument of state power. She pointed to the extraordinary stability of caste structure and leadership among the Roman Catholic Parava caste of southeastern India:

The explanation lies in the group's relationship with its European patrons, and the way in which their Christian customs and observances came to support and strengthen their organization as a caste group possessing all the attributes which we now associate with 'traditional' south Asian castes.

⁴⁰ Thomas Marshall, *Statistical Reports ... Southern Mahratta Country* (Printed for the Government at the Gazette Press, 1822): on Padshahpur "the Weavers are either of the *tribe* of Lingayut or of another Kanaree *tribe* called Hutgur ..." 18; "the *tribe* of Bunyas educated to reading and accmpts being unknown here ..." (24); "a respectable Mahratta (to which *race* the institution is confined) ..." 83; from north India in the same period we find two Muslim communities self-classified as Sheikh and Sayyad referred to as 'races': "The village is divided into two puttees, corresponding with the two *races* (sic) by which it is occupied ..." *Selections from the Revenue Records of the North-West Provinces A.D. 1822-1833* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces Government Press, 1872), 93. Emphases added.

⁴¹ Latin text in S. Rajamanickam, *Roberto De Nobili on Indian Customs Part II* (Palayamkot-tai: De Nobili Research Institute, 1972), 4-5; or 'estate', 'rank' and 'lineage' respectively.

⁴² Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, 13-14.

She argues convincingly that European powers—like the indigenous rulers who preceded them—realized that it would be far easier to skim off the profits of the pearl trade if they could build up the authority of the Paravas' caste 'elders' and notables.⁴³

Indeed, as we shall see more fully in the next chapter, not merely the Portuguese but many early colonial administrations found it useful and necessary to manage Indians through ascriptive corporate organizations. This was true of the Dutch and the early British administration in Sri Lanka, for example. Under British rule, in 1829 the Board of Commissioners recognized that government exaction of compulsory labor-dues had "the effect of perpetuating distinctions of Castes—as long as labour is compulsory the demand for it must be regulated according to caste."⁴⁴ John Rogers has shown that in Sri Lanka the term 'caste' was used to cover varied sets of people, and so had "the same flexibility as Sinhala words such as *jatiya* or *kulaya*, which connoted 'group', 'species' or 'kind'."⁴⁵ It was, then used in very much the same way as *khum* or *qaum* was used on the mainland. So Colebrooke, an early English official in the island, saw caste as an institution of civil society that was still functional though de-sacralized (in his view) by the Sinhalas' conversion to Buddhism.

The social anthropologist A.M. Hocart (1884–1939) drew on his Sri Lankan experiences to develop another functional line of thinking about caste. He described it as dependent on services performed, originating in "liturgical" roles or roles in a collective sacrifice organized by a ruler who had to maintain his distance from death pollution. The central figure for Hocart, then, was the wielder of power, the king or his equivalent as *yajamāna* (sacrificer) not the officiating priest or Brahman, as most Orientalists believed.⁴⁶ Hocart then compared this understanding of caste with similar institutions elsewhere in the world.⁴⁷ His ideas were largely ignored till revived by Dirks in 1987. I will develop this point further in Chapter 3.

⁴³ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900*, 327.

⁴⁴ G.C. Mendis, selected and ed. *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796–1833* 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), vol. 2, 283.

⁴⁵ John D. Rogers, "Caste as Social Category and Identity in Colonial Sri Lanka," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 41, 1 (2004): 53.

⁴⁶ Interestingly enough, that he sought to exalt the kings over the Brahmans was one of the charges brought by the Madurai Brahmans against Nobili. *Mission du Maduré*, II, 31.

⁴⁷ Hocart, *Caste: A Comparative Study*, 7–57 and *passim*; see Chapter 2, for an elaboration of these points.

The Rise of the Official Indological View of Caste

The idea of caste as a functional ordering of civil society was gradually abandoned by the colonial bureaucracy on the Indian mainland. This reflected both changes in administrative practice and the rise of new, prestigious institutions of scholarship in Europe. Academic authority shifted to metropolitan centers, where scholars trained for years to interpret ancient texts but rarely (if ever) ventured out to Asia. Expertise was no longer acquired by travel, residence, or everyday business experience: it depended on a detailed knowledge of dead languages and ancient scripts.⁴⁸ The valorization of textual knowledge foregrounded the Brahmans who had composed the oldest parts of it, and this fitted well with the missionary current in Oriental studies, which had a natural propensity to see caste as a product of malign Brahman dominance, if not fraud and conspiracy. This went back to St. Francis Xavier, who wrote in 1544 that there was a perverse “breed” (*engeance*) among the Hindus (Gentils) known as Brahmans who controlled all the other gentiles. These Brahmans knew the true doctrines but conspired to conceal them.⁴⁹ Three centuries later, the pioneer Indologist and clergyman John Wilson inveighed against their “fraud” and “invention” in similar terms. Its effect he argued was that legislation “in the hands of the Brahmans soon became unjust, tyrannical and unreasonable in an unconceivable degree ...”⁵⁰ Cohn sums this up:

The orientalist and the missionaries were polar opposites in their assessment of Indian culture and society, but were in accord as to what the central principles and institutions of the society were. They agreed that it was a society in which religious ideas and practices underlay all social structure; they agreed on the primacy of the Brahman ...⁵¹

Nineteenth-century British civil servants in India were increasingly academics manqué and naturally deferential to the new institutions of schol-

⁴⁸ Thomas Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* [1996] Indian edition (Delhi: Vistaar Books, 1997).

⁴⁹ Cited in Ines Zupanov, “Le Repli du Religiueux: Les Missionnaires jésuites du 17^e siècle entre la théologie chrétienne et une éthique païenne,” *Annale HSS Nov.* – Dec. 1996, no. 6, 1204–1205.

⁵⁰ John Wilson, *The Indian Military Revolt Viewed in Its Religious Aspects* (Bombay: Smith, Taylor and Co., 1857), 15.

⁵¹ Bernard Cohn, “Notes on the Study of Indian Society and Culture” in *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, eds. Milton Singer and Bernard Cohn (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 10; Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-century Western India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 63–67 provides an excellent account.

arship. In addition, quasi-academic projects offered not merely prestige but the possibility of escaping the discomfort and isolation of rural postings—indeed, for the truly adept the delightful prospect of living in London on full salary.⁵² The trend was sufficiently striking for it to be satirized by Rudyard Kipling in *Under the Deodars*, where the fictional Mrs. Hauksbee promotes the career of an obscure civil servant by giving out that he was an authority on the “Gullals”, a fierce aboriginal tribe.⁵³

The rise of professional Oriental scholarship, based especially on knowledge of the classical languages of Asia and located in the major western universities, then began to transmute colonial knowledge. It was especially powerful in the emerging field of anthropology, which professionalized itself in the later decades of the nineteenth century with race as its central paradigm.⁵⁴ Officials such as H.H. Risley quickly leapt on the new scientific bandwagon and helped create what Bernard Cohn dubbed the “official view” of caste in his seminal 1968 essay “Notes on the Study of Indian Society and Culture.” Caste was reduced to an array of reified physical essences (such as the ‘nasal index’) and enumerable census identities in an unchanging society.⁵⁵ Risley in fact dedicated his effort to correlate anthropometry and culture to “Sir William Turner K.C.B., Chief among English Craniologists”. The fact that the treatises of this school offer such easy targets for postcolonial critique has given them an undue prominence in the contemporary academy. This has obscured the fact that *none* of these doctrines had any significant impact on the actual working of the Government of India. Risley could waste government resources measuring noses in Bengal to his heart’s content, but not even in that province did anything change as a consequence. The doctrine of ‘martial races,’ which had a profound impact on the composition of the army, had been enunciated by Field Marshal F.S. Roberts decades earlier, and was loosely based on geography and political loyalty. No consistent nasal index could have made the peasantry of Panjab *and* those of the Nepal hills the prime cannon-fodder of the British

⁵² William W. Hunter is an outstanding example of this phenomenon. If one reads Francis H. Skrine’s, *Life of William Wilson Hunter* (London: Longmans, 1901), closely, it is striking how Hunter was able to escape unpleasant postings by virtue of his official ‘statistical’ projects.

⁵³ Rudyard Kipling, “The Education of Otis Yeere” in *Under the Deodars, The Phantom Rickshaw, Wee Willie Winkie* (no place: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1916), 24–25.

⁵⁴ See Guha, “Lower Strata, Older Races.”

⁵⁵ Cohn, “Notes” in *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, eds. Singer and Cohn, 15–17. The ‘nasal index’ was the ratio of the elevation to the breadth of the nose. A sort of caliper was used to measure it. See Herbert H. Risley, *The People of India* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1908).

Indian army. Nor did it determine the identity of the “traditional aristocracy”, the “natural leaders” or the “agriculturists” that a considerable body of late nineteenth-century legislation sought to protect.⁵⁶

The really operational social theories of the colonial era are best illustrated in Panjab. This was a politically and militarily vital province: it was the gateway to Central Asia and the most important recruiting area for the army. Septimus S. Thorburn’s dire warnings of the dangers of Muslim peasant disloyalty in the strategic province were (unlike the cephalic index) taken seriously in Calcutta and London.⁵⁷ Ignoring all the developing academic orthodoxy on caste, the Government of India after a decade of discussion passed an important piece of legislation: the Alienation of Land Act of 1900. This act ignored then-current scientific classifications to demarcate a large number of ‘agricultural tribes’ whose land rights were henceforth to be protected against ‘non-agriculturists’ such as village menials, on the one hand, and Brahmans and Hindu traders on the other.⁵⁸ The choice of the term “tribe” itself and the inclusion of select Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu communities in the list of tribes show what the politically relevant communities were deemed to be.

The Alienation of Land Act had a precursor in Bombay Presidency, where the peasant farmers of the Maratha heartland were protected by the Deccan Agriculturist’s Relief Act of 1879. That act was passed in the midst of anxiety generated by widespread anti-moneylender riots in 1875; the region, however, was not a significant recruiting area for the army. But officialdom was aware that Maratha armies had dominated the much of India in the eighteenth century and periodically worried about the possibility of insurrections there. As in Panjab, political expediency rather than anthropological theory dictated policy. We shall explore these themes more fully in Chapter 6.

Alongside the ‘official view,’ but submerged because it lacked ‘grand theory,’ lived what Cohn has called the “village view of caste” as embodied in the publications of agrarian administrators, of a few missionaries like William Wiser, and some remarkable Department of Agriculture officials such as Harold Mann.⁵⁹ They paid exceptional regard to the organization of eco-

⁵⁶ See Chapter 6 for a further discussion of these issues.

⁵⁷ Septimus S. Thorburn, *Musalman and Moneylenders in the Punjab* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1886), 1–6.

⁵⁸ Norman G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* (Raleigh: Duke University Program in Comparative Studies on Southern Asia, 1966), esp. 110–116.

⁵⁹ Cohn, “Notes on the Study,” 20–21.

nomic life, the conditions of agricultural production and rural institutions. The same attention to economic organization is also reflected in work stemming from the effort to establish cooperative societies for credit and other purposes. The Punjab Board of Economic Inquiry published important studies in the inter-war period. Outstanding examples of this include the work of Malcolm Darling and Frank L. Brayne in the Panjab and the neglected but amazingly rich work by D.R. Gadgil and his colleagues at the Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics from the 1930s.⁶⁰ Much of the latter appeared in Marathi and has therefore suffered a double measure of the usual neglect of India-generated research in the Western academy. These studies generally stayed close to their subjects and eschewed large generalization. Finally, the influence of Bronislaw Malinowski encouraged the ethnographic study of communities in areas outside the 'settled' agrarian provinces of British India. In the case of the Naga peoples of the Northeast, these studies were state-sponsored efforts in aid of governance.⁶¹

A burst of field research came after decolonization and the beginning of the cold war. A new generation of anthropologists entered the field with certain assumptions, penetratingly summarized by Bernard Cohn in 1968. These assumptions included the idea that the object of study should be a circumscribed system—especially the 'self-sufficient Indian village'—and that change within this unit began only recently, after a long period of stability: this was 'traditional India.' This second assumption was, as Cohn observed, simply "the Orientalist's assumption of the unchanging character of Indian civilization." In addition, caste was assumed to be the central institution of rural Indian society; it had survived unchanged in traditional India.

Cohn noted in 1968 that these foundational assumptions had been severely shaken by field experience in the 1950s and 1960s. A new, revised, 'village view' of Indian society began to emerge out of the work of both Western social scientists and indigenous scholars such as Andre Béteille, M.N. Srinivas, and Hamza Alavi, among others.⁶² Important schools of

⁶⁰ Malcolm L. Darling, *Rusticus Loquitur or the Old Light and the New in the Punjab Village* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1930); Dhananjay R. Gadgil, et al. *Survey of Wai Taluka* (Poona: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1940); Harold H. Mann and N.V. Kanitkar, *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village I: Pimple Soudagar* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1917); and *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village II: Jategaon Budruk* (Bombay: University of Bombay, 1921). More references to a few of the many important publications of the Gokhale Institute will be found in Chapter 3.

⁶¹ Cohn, "Notes on the Study," 23.

⁶² Many of these were represented in Part III "Some Problems and Processes of Culture

thought grew up or developed further in Bombay, Calcutta, Lucknow, Delhi, and elsewhere. The concept of social mobility was extended to the study of Indian society and the caste hierarchy, though the significance of ritual pollution as an important and pervasive element in Indian social organization was also accepted. Regional and local diversity and the presence of contradictory impulses were all recognized. Reality was recognized as messy.⁶³

It was almost inevitable that the pendulum would swing back toward a more sweeping, conceptually rigid and logically consistent, if static and unrealistic view. The swing was led by Louis Dumont and gained momentum from the increasing vogue of structuralism across the humanities from the mid-sixties on. The search for synchronic (and therefore timeless) structure fitted easily into the old Orientalist template of Asian society.⁶⁴ Indian society was structured, in his view, by the ultimate values of Hinduism—centrally by the polarity of pure and impure.⁶⁵ Groups such as the Muslims who rejected this polarity formed a society that may have coexisted with Hindus for a thousand years, but the two “were strangers to one another in virtue of the opposition of their values.”⁶⁶ Likewise, Lingayats or even Sinhala Buddhists had to be excluded from the model. Even so, it was hard to stretch this schema onto even the Republic of India, not to speak of other South Asian states. Dumont had to resort to speculative history: his theoretical model *had been true* at some point in the past but had been damaged by Muslim rule.⁶⁷ When confronted with evidence of caste hierarchies with-

Change” of the important volume *Traditional India: Structure and Change*, ed. Milton Singer (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959); and in *Structure and Change*, eds. Singer and Cohn.

⁶³ Singer, Preface to *Structure and Change*, x–xi.

⁶⁴ The nineteenth-century Sanskrit scholar Max Muller wrote, “The Hindus were a nation of philosophers. Their struggles were the struggles of thought ... It might justly be said that India has no place in the political history of the world.” Cited in Kumkum Roy, *The Emergence of Monarchy in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5. Almost a century later, Jan Heesterman pronounced on “the inner springs of Indian civilization ... It devalorizes society and disregards power. ... Indian society and its ideal are separated by a chasm and cannot be united.” Jan C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 192–193.

⁶⁵ “A structure is present or absent, *it does not change*.” Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* enlarged edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 219; emphasis original.

⁶⁶ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*. This despite the fact that “[w]e are not as well-informed as we would wish on the relations between the Muslims and the caste system.” 205, 206. We could have gratified our wish by simply reading Imtiaz Ahmed, ed., *Caste and Social Stratification Among Muslims in India* (first published 1973; revised and enlarged edition, Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1978).

⁶⁷ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 206–207, 46–47. Other challenges were met with *ad hoc*

out Brahmans, such as in Sri Lanka, he simply declared these “quasi-caste,” not caste proper.⁶⁸ *Homo Hierarchicus*, as van der Veer pointed out, exemplifies how Orientalist discourse is recycled into “a postcolonial sociological understanding of Indian society.”⁶⁹ Dumont did make a concession to historical evidence by admitting that the Indian social system could lose its central values, and then caste would “substantialize” into something like ethnicity.⁷⁰ For my purposes, this concession is sufficient. I will show how we can understand the sociopolitical history of South Asia in terms of the interaction of substantialized corporate organizations, the largest of which approximated to the ethnic blocs of Barth’s Swat model. It is this feature that still makes it possible for caste (as Dirks observed in 2001) to be the central symbol for India, its essence.

Power as the Prime Mover of Social Organization

Dumont’s sweeping characterization of a society that no field anthropologist could ever have seen did not pass unchallenged. There was an early and sharp response by Andre B  teille.⁷¹ Then the 1980s saw the appearance of important books by the anthropologists Arjun Appadurai (1981), Nicholas Dirks (1987), and Susan Bayly (1989). First Appadurai showed how participation in and patronage of temple ritual politically integrated local society.⁷² Then Nicholas Dirks challenged the separation of caste hierarchy and state power by arguing that the dominance of Brahmans had been exaggerated and in reality kingship had been vital to the caste hierarchy.⁷³ He therefore revived Hocart’s idea that caste roles were liturgical and centered on the king or his equivalent. It was, however, Susan Bayly who made a vital advance by presenting a historical analysis of south Indian society in which Muslims and Christians also participated in a politically structured system of

speculative history. So for example, he explained the “relative weakness of ideas of impurity in the north, a weakness probably occasioned by the ascendancy of the sects and the impact of Islam,” 220–221.

⁶⁸ Dumont, *ibid.*, 216.

⁶⁹ Van der Veer, “The Foreign Hand,” 24; see also 31–33, where he notes the “orientalist acceptance of Brahmanical ideology ...”.

⁷⁰ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 222–226.

⁷¹ Especially “Homo Hierarchicus, Homo Equalis” (1979), reprinted with other important essays in *The Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays* [1983] (reprint Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2003), 35–56.

⁷² Appadurai, *Worship and Conflict under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case*.

⁷³ Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

patronage and honor.⁷⁴ Thus Dirks and Bayly opened a new way of understanding South Asian society and—by returning political power to social structure, they also allowed us to link it with the studies of modern political life that flourished from the 1950s onward. A few had, indeed, crossed the boundary separating anthropologists and political scientists in the 1960s. The most successful attempt was made by Andre Béteille, who in 1965 perceived the integrated power that Brahman village landlords in Tanjavur had derived from the conjunction of landownership *and* high ritual status.⁷⁵

In her later (1999) more general history of caste, Susan Bayly argued convincingly that caste relations could change over time and that peoples who did not conform to the classic models might have been both attracted and pressured into closer conformity to them in recent centuries. She also made the important point that we should relate changing social practices with the making and unraveling of states through the long eighteenth century that culminated in the establishment of colonial rule.⁷⁶ But while programmatically addressing non-Hindu communities such as Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Jains, she nonetheless tended to fall back into an *idiom* of caste status centered on purity and exaltation of and by Brahmins, which can only apply in broadly Hindu ritual contexts.⁷⁷ Deference to Brahmins could not, for instance, be deployed to understand the regime of Tipu Sultan in Mysore who, in a set of regulations issued two or three years after his accession, ordered the seizure of all land grants held by temples or Brahmins within his dominion while he simultaneously exempted “Cauzees” and “respectable” Muslims from grain and house taxes. He also decreed that all new converts to Islam were to pay (land?) tax at half rate because Muslims were the most worthy community (*ahamm kaum*).⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*.

⁷⁵ Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power* new edn. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 182–183; see also Andre Beteille, “Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamilnad” in *Caste in Indian Politics*, ed. Rajni Kothari (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010), 259–298.

⁷⁶ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) esp. Chap. 1 and 2.

⁷⁷ See Bayly, *ibid.*, 68–79, “the advance of the arms-bearer and shedder of blood brought with it in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the exaltation of the Brahman ...”, 73.

⁷⁸ Burrish Crisp, trans., *The Mysorean Revenue Regulations Translated by B. Crisp from the Original Persian, under the Seal of Tippoo Sultaun* (Calcutta, 1792), art. 63, 69, 73; another version of a similar but later set of regulations in Persian, Marathi and Kannada was obtained from the Hyderabad archives by A.R. Kulkarni and Padmakar Prabhune, who published the Marathi text in *Samśodhaka* vol. 70, nos. 2–4 (2002), “Tipu Sultanācā Hukmnamā”; see clause 73, on 58. I discuss the significance of this text in Chapter 5.

Likewise, the numerous Afghan and Baluch principalities that mushroomed across northern and central India during the decline of the Mughals, and which Jos Gommans has dubbed the Indo-Afghan Empire, were often marked by an assertive Sunni orthodoxy and the discourse, if rarely the practice, of *jihad*.⁷⁹ They certainly had scant regard for the sacred character of Brahmans. So, for example, angered by the discovery of a Maratha conspiracy against the chiefdom, the Nawab of Bhopal seized two Brahmans and forced the fresh blood of a cow down their throats before sending them to the leading Maratha courts to evince his contempt for his enemies.⁸⁰ Nor indeed could that paradigm be used to understand the explicitly Shi'i sectarian politics of the Nawabs of Awadh, who went to the extent of resuming land grants made earlier to Sunni worthies and religious establishments by the Mughal emperors whose governors they supposedly were.⁸¹ All of these real political and social phenomena can be understood only if we abandon Brahman-centered models.

The inability to escape the Brahmanical outlook also beset Nicholas Dirks's 2001 effort to theorize the caste system on an all-India scale. He began with a strong statement of the importance of 'power' as embodied in the king to determine rank and status. Dirks (like Susan Bayly before him) argued that the Brahman-centered modern hierarchy was generated as a consequence of colonial rule. Yet he asserted that in precolonial times, political forces worked on the status of all except Brahmans and Dalits. These two were positioned "at the extreme ends of the caste order."⁸² An order thus polarized can only be a purity-based religious order with rulers dependent on the Brahmans whose purity allowed them to consecrate others—in other words, a Hindu polity. But as we saw in 'pre-colonial times' there were many important (and in brahmanical terms highly impure) rulers who had little regard for Brahmans as such.

The bases of Dirks's reasoning are clarified by his argument that the statelet of Pudukottai was an exemplary location for the understanding of Indian society because these little kingdoms were marginal remnants of an (unspecified) "old regime." In southern India, he argued, "kings were

⁷⁹ Jos J.L. Gommans, *The Rise of Indo-Afghan Empire, c. 1710–1780* [1995] Indian edition (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1999), 166–170.

⁸⁰ John Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India including Malwa*, 2 vols. (London: Parbury, Allen and Co., 1832,) I, 391.

⁸¹ Juan R.I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 42.

⁸² Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 65.

not inferior to Brahmans; the political was not encompassed by religious domain Indian society, indeed caste itself, was shaped by political struggles and processes.”⁸³ Mutatis mutandis, that should be even truer of rulers of wider domains belonging to different religions. What was *their* role in the shaping of Indian society? Dirks’s answer is that if Pudukottai had come under the “patrimonial control” of Muslim or British rulers, then caste would have been detached from kingship. He wrote that because

Pudukottai was not brought under patrimonial control—*neither that of the Islamic rulers in the south nor later that of the British*—caste was never set completely loose from kingship.⁸⁴ (emphasis added).

By implication, then, the caste system had been “set loose from kingship” in the huge swath of India from the Himalaya south to the Indian Ocean, most of which was after all, under Islamic rulers for five hundred or more years. So Dirks’s model, like Dumont’s, would apply mainly to an imaginatively reconstructed pre-Islamic India. The implication is that colonial rule only took the process begun under Muslim kings a stage further. The starting point of Dirks’s argument is consciously opposed to Dumont but it terminates in a rather similar conclusion. After ‘patrimonial rule’, British or Islamic, decapitated the Hindu kingdom, the residual state would closely resemble what Dumont imagined: a hierarchical society ordered by relative purity even after the Hindu king who had shaped it had departed. Furthermore, the social basis of the king’s power is left unclear: yet Indian texts from early times knew that the king was but one element of the state and could not work without the others. Dirks’s king is a rather lifeless figure who never flogged a tax-defaulter or beheaded a rival.

Nur Yalman, like Hocart a student of Sri Lanka, was a trenchant critic of the focus on the purity-pollution continuum as the master key to South Asian society. Instead, like early administrators of the island, he saw castes as the bricks from which kingdoms were built. Caste (he wrote) was not merely a convenient way to organize the agrarian economy. It appeared “to be a political and divine tool useful to kings and gods and not a monopoly of the Brahmins.”⁸⁵ Yet, as the case of the Paravas showed, this political tool was as useful to agents of his Most Faithful Majesty of Portugal as to the Nayakas

⁸³ Dirks, *Hollow Crown* Second edition, 4–5.

⁸⁴ Dirks, *Hollow Crown*, 9.

⁸⁵ Nur Yalman, “On Royalty, Caste and Temples in Sri Lanka and South India” in *Identity, Consciousness and the Past*, ed. H.L. Seneviratne (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 138–140, 146. This point will be further developed in Chapter 2.

who served Vijayanagara or the kings of Kandy. In my view (as Susan Bayly suggested in 1989), the crucial element in the formation and continuation of this political tool is the maintenance of *internal structures of authority* and *external boundaries*. Because the Portuguese regime was unusually durable, this generated the paradox that the Parava Christians had patterns of caste cohesion much stronger than those of 'Hindu' castes.⁸⁶ Thus Susan Bayly was the only author who developed a model that encompassed diverse religions and also the entire early modern period. She also pointed to the social dimensions of state formation and political processes generally. Unfortunately, she never followed through on this research program and thus like Dirks relapsed into a Brahman-centered model. The lordly warrior domains that Bayly (1999) rightly sees as important features of the sociopolitical picture of South Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were far more fragile and locally embedded than the British state that succeeded them. They emerged from regional society and were often the property of dominant communities. Across much of India, they were controlled by Muslim rulers indifferent to or contemptuous of Brahmans. They can therefore best be analyzed with Barth's model of social power and ethnic boundaries. He summed this up in the subtitle of an important collection that he edited in 1969: "the social organization of culture difference."⁸⁷ For Barth this was the "critical focus of investigation ... the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses."⁸⁸ But boundaries in South Asia were often enforced by secular power.

We can see an instructive example of such boundary creation at work in central India in the 1770s. A Brahman named Narhari, living in territory under the rule of the Maratha Peśvā, had been captured by the Afghans at the battle of Panipat (1761). He lived among them for ten or twelve years as a Muslim. He then came back and was purified by some Brahmans at the important religious center of Paithan. But in the Brahman-dominated Pune government's opinion, someone who had been a Muslim for ten or twelve years could never be purified, and so the Brahmans who had performed the cleansing were put out of caste by the Brahman establishment in the Maratha capital, Pune. Some of them submitted to ritual purification, but some forty or fifty obstinately refused to submit to this judgment and remained outcast. Here a political complication intervened: Paithan

⁸⁶ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 327.

⁸⁷ Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* new Edition [1969].

⁸⁸ Barth, ed., "Introduction" to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 15.

was under the rule of the (Muslim) Nizam of Hyderabad, and although the patronage and prestige of the Citpāvan Brahman Peśvā no doubt gave him considerable power, he could not coerce the residents there. So the recalcitrant Brahmans went to the Nizam's local officer and, with his support, compelled the other local Brahmans to sit in the same row to eat with them. Commensality being a central symbolic act in South Asian society, this step effectively reunited the community in defiance of the Maratha government. All that the Peśvā could do was to issue an order in his own adjoining district of Ahmednagar commanding that its Brahmans should boycott the Brahmans of Paithan.⁸⁹

In 1776, a Brahman from Jalna in the Nizam's dominions was found in the Maratha capital. He was charged with associating with the outcast Narhari and fined the considerable sum of 475 rupees.⁹⁰ The likely consequence of such a policy would have been the effective separation of the Nizam's state Brahmans into a subcaste distinct from the Pune-Ahmednagar ones. We do not know the further history of the dispute, but this episode illustrates why effective caste groups often followed political boundaries. It is important to note also that the famously learned and holy Brahmans of Paithan had no scruples in relying on Muslim authority to adjudicate and enforce sacred law against the decree of a proudly orthodox Brahman regime in Pune. The metaphorical cudgel of power (*danda*) seems to have been morally neutral as long as one had the right end of it.

We shall see more instances of such Barthesian processes at work in later chapters of this book. Indeed, the persistence of institutions (for example, "caste") under regimes with a different civilizational heritage is extremely useful in revealing the forces that reproduced it. As Cohen reminds us, forms of symbolic action may be survivals of the past, but live in the present "because they play important roles within the contemporary social settings."⁹¹ The 'nonstandard' areas (and periods) that can show us the multi-stranded nature of social organization, precisely because they lack some features of the standard model but nonetheless reproduce its structure. That is why Jaffna, Goa, Swat, western Panjab and other 'peripheral' regions can tell us much about the subcontinent as a whole.

⁸⁹ G.S. Sardesai, ed., SPD vol. 43: 25.

⁹⁰ Narendra K. Wagle, "The Government, the *Jāti* and the Individual: Rights, Discipline and Control in the Pune Kotwal Papers, 1766–1794," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 34, 3 (2000): 358.

⁹¹ Cohen, *Two Dimensional Man*, 3.

The social anthropologists discussed in Bernard Cohn's "Notes" were not, of course, the only scholars studying society and politics in newly independent India and Pakistan. Political scientists, sociologists, and 'development' scholars were present alongside them, and they are strongly represented in Milton Singer and Bernard Cohn's influential *Structure and Change in Indian Society*. But the divide between the two groups persisted. Rajni Kothari, whose work early on spanned the range from development studies to social anthropology, sought to bridge the gap. He commented in 1970 that the dichotomy of tradition and modernity had led to a false cognitive hiatus between society on one hand and polity on the other. Important research emerged from his effort like the essays that Robert Hardgrave, Richard Sisson, Ramashray Roy and Andre Béteille contributed to Kothari's important volume *Caste in Indian Politics*. I draw on their work in later chapters. But the world of Western anthropology was enamored of grand models and arm-chair theorists and so Dumont ruled the roost. Kothari, commenting on the changing world of Indian politics, wrote that historically speaking, "there never was a complete polarization between the political system and the caste system," and that what the twentieth century had brought was

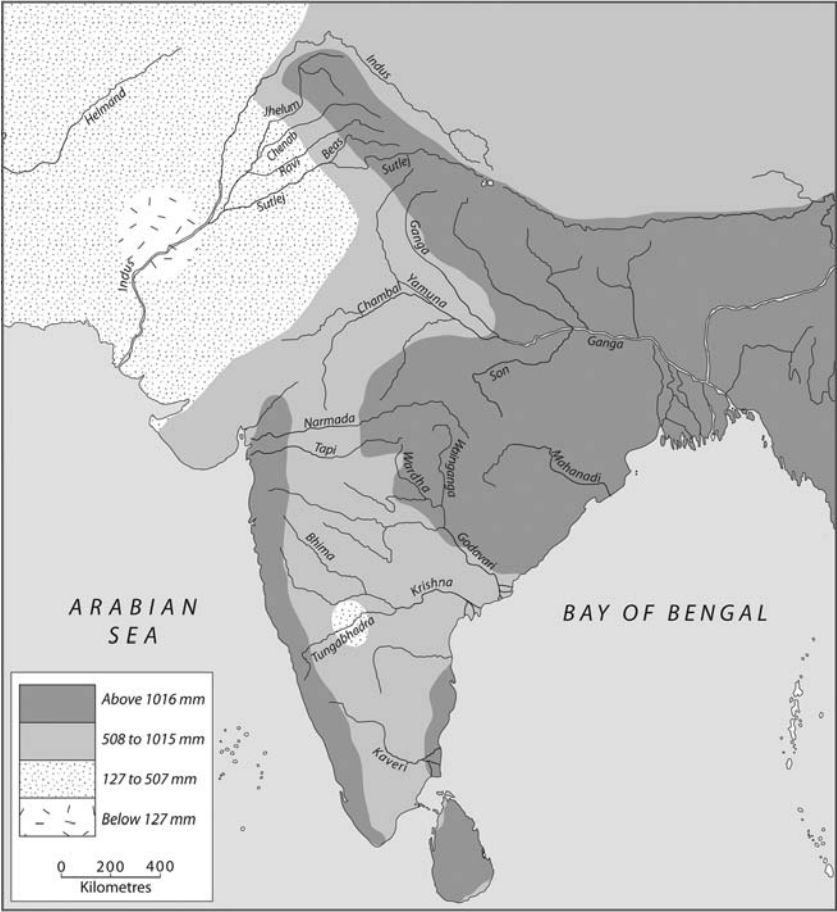
a change in the *context and level of political operation*, a shift in social priorities and a somewhat different picking and choosing between the variety of elements that in any case, at all times, have entered into the functioning of the social and political system in India.⁹²

The most recent phase of the process has been penetratingly analyzed by scholars such as Kanchan Chandra, Dipankar Gupta, and Ghanshyam Shah, none of whom appear in the recommended readings list of the most recent anthropological effort to generalize about caste in India.⁹³

My goal in this volume is to concretize the social and political systems of the historical past and connect that past to the present. In other words, to bring the state system and political power back into our understanding of the millennial past of South Asian society. The next chapter will seek to begin this process looking at evidence from the earliest states traceable in the Indian subcontinent, some 2,500 years ago.

⁹² Kothari, "Introduction" to *Caste in Indian Politics*, 7. Emphasis added.

⁹³ Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*; Ghanshyam Shah, *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975); Ghanshyam Shah, ed., *Caste and Democratic Politics in India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002); Dipankar Gupta, *Rivalry and Brotherhood: Politics in the Life of Farmers in Northern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997). The recommended readings list is in Diane Mines, *Caste in India* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2009), 83–84.



Map 3. Average annual rainfall in South Asia

CHAPTER TWO

TERRITORIAL POWER:
THE SPATIAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

[C]aste mainly exists and functions as a regional system.

– M.N. Srinivas¹

Social Practice and Territorial Power

‘Boundary’ is a spatial metaphor transformed into a social one. Any caste was delimited by both. For most groups, the effective circle of recognition was the arena constituted by a few dozen villages; the zone of surveillance limited to the immediate area of a village.² Dirks has already pointed to the importance of recognizing territory as a significant marker of social identity to understand local dominance and caste order.³ This chapter will sketch an outline history of the constitution and ultimate disintegration of the localities or village-clusters where almost all the *functional* aspects of social hierarchy have historically resided. These territories have sometimes been theorized as ‘little kingdoms’; I argue that they were often not kingdoms at all. Finally, these territories were repeatedly renewed in pre-British times through processes that changed their boundaries yet revitalized their autonomy. Such diachronic inquiry is intellectually unavoidable. As Klass points out, failure to take history seriously simply leaves the field to uninformed guesswork and ad hoc explanation.⁴

Chief among such outmoded ideas is one that has developed from a report by the nineteenth-century colonial official Charles Metcalfe on the

¹ M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Reprint. Bombay: Orient Longman, 1982), 3.

² M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, 3; Adrian C. Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India* [1960] (reprint Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 4–5; Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 154–155.

³ Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 78.

⁴ Klass, *Caste* 1993 edition, xv.

villages of the Delhi region. It was popularized by Karl Marx. This depicted the political order of premodern South Asia as one in which isolated, self-contained villages tenaciously maintained their traditions while helplessly sustaining the load of a despotic power above them.⁵ This picture is in considerable need of revision. The village was indeed a socially and politically important entity that I will discuss further in Chapter 3; but it has never been an autonomous unit. The present chapter will look at a regional level of authority that I call the ‘village cluster,’ an equivalent perhaps in sixteenth-century India to the county of early medieval Europe. We encounter the village cluster under various names—the most common of which would be *nāḍu* in the south and *pargana* in the north; it was often designated *janapada* in the Sanskrit tradition. These localities were the earliest units of organized social hierarchy in South Asia. This was the main arena in which hierarchy was defined and enforced well into the twentieth century. These little kingdoms and clan territories played a crucial role in integrating social practice with political power. This was recognized in McKim Marriott’s extensive survey of caste ranking and community structure in India and Pakistan published in 1965 and carefully documented in Brenda Beck’s monograph on the Koṅku region of Tamilnadu.⁶

Likewise, despite the massive enhancement in communication facilities on the subcontinent in the twentieth century, M.N. Srinivas noted that caste mainly existed and functioned as a sub-regional system. Even the most widespread category of castes, Brahman, was divided into a dozen or more endogamous groups within every region and Brahmans of one region might refuse food and water handled by those of another region. To the average peasant, the names of castes in other linguistic areas were pure abracadabra. They made sense only when fitted into the Sanskritik frame of *varṇa*, which, however, had little presence in everyday life. Om Prakash Valmiki, a Dalit from western UP, was taken for Brahman in Maharashtra and, since he had a secure job in a government ammunition factory, sought as a son-in-law. His last name, though immediately recognizable in his home region, suggested Brahman status in Maharashtra.⁷ Geographical evidence for the existence

⁵ Karl Marx, “The British Rule in India” [1853] in *Collected Works* Vol. 12, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1968), 128–132.

⁶ McKim Marriott, *Caste Ranking and Community Structure in Five Regions of India and Pakistan* (Poona: Deccan College, 1965); Brenda E.F. Beck, *Peasant Society in Koṅku: A study of right and left subcastes in south India* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1972).

⁷ M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* [1966] (Reprint, Bombay: Orient Longman, 1982), 9–15; McKim Marriott had already observed that a “villager of one place cannot move to a village far from his own or to any town without loss of caste recognition and without

of these sub-regions was also found in Schwartzberg's 1960s mapping of the north Indian plain, despite the imperfections of census data that had already homogenized social identities in the process of tabulation.⁸ Localization in practice and generalization in theory seems to be an old feature of the system. It was recognized in tradition by (for instance) organizing the Brahmans into regional sets each with unorthodox practices specific to it.⁹ Pragmatically, therefore, the relevant arena for discussion of the 'caste system' should be a sub-regional but supra-village one. Even with the contemporary explosion in modes of communication, recognition even across provincial lines is hard to achieve.¹⁰

So we need to develop a spatially grounded understanding of how political formations functioned and how their working both utilized and transformed the bounded communities of the Indian subcontinent. Assisted by the long and rich epigraphic record of the south Indian temples, historians of that region have pioneered the study of society and politics in historic India, but their work has regrettably not received the attention it deserves. Nilakanta Sastri's under-analyzed but empirically rich work was followed by important studies from Noboru Karashima and then Tsukaza Mizushima.¹¹ Looking at north India, significant indicators of these patterns of sociopolitical life are to be found in the writings of nineteenth-century colonial officials but have largely been ignored.¹² In the 1950s, the anthropologist Oscar Lewis found traditions of large-scale collective action in a village near Delhi; this evidence of active sociopolitical life ironically came from the very locale in which Metcalfe drew his famous description of the isolated, unchanging village republic.¹³ A decade later, M.C. Pradhan drew upon field work

confusion as to caste ranks ..." "Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization," in *Village India*, ed. Marriott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 191; Valmiki, *Jūṭhan* (Dillī: Rādhākṛṣṇa Prakāśan second edition, 2003), 116.

⁸ Joseph E. Schwartzberg, "Caste Regions of the North Indian Plain," in *Structure and Change*, Singer and Cohn eds. 81–113.

⁹ Chitrarekha Gupta, *The Brahmanas of India: A Study based on Inscriptions* (Delhi: Sundeeep Prakashan, 1983), 122–123.

¹⁰ See Kanchan Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*, 288, for a telling example.

¹¹ K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cōlas* second edition (Madras: University of Madras, 1955), 486–514.

¹² A mass of valuable information can be found in the District Settlement Reports prepared for the United Provinces, Panjab and Sindh as part of the process of land demarcation and creation of a record of rights and tenures in the late nineteenth century.

¹³ Oscar Lewis' field notes described a council of a hundred villages meeting in 1915 to partition the common lands of one of them. Cited in Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul, "The Commons, Community and the Courts in Colonial Punjab," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 29 (1992): 393.

and local traditions to depict the Jāt peasantry of the western Gangetic plain as organized for political action through the entire medieval period. It is certain that the same communities had a complex nested structure of caste councils when studied by the social anthropologist Dipankar Gupta in the 1980s.¹⁴ Institutional networks of collective life have been found by Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul, who has traced the institutions of collective management of common lands in north India through two hundred years.¹⁵ Further east, Bernard Cohn demonstrated how dramatically rural dominance shifted between the end of the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the Benaras region of north India with dominant communities ousting each other from hundreds of villages.¹⁶ The larger import of such research has not been adequately appreciated by historians.

The major exception was Burton Stein who in the 1960s developed a bold new synthesis of sociopolitical life in south India that stimulated considerable research.¹⁷ In my judgment, this model is widely applicable across South Asia. Stein divided the history of south India from the ninth to the nineteenth century into three “episodes,” and his conspectus offers an unrivaled point of entry into the *longue durée* of south India. In his view, the first phase was the Pallava-Chola integration from the ninth to the twelfth century; the second was the Vijayanagara integration of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the third was the British colonial one from the beginning of the nineteenth century. (Intermediate epochs were presumably times of disintegration from which the new integration emerged.) In the first phase, Stein believed, the monarchical state sat lightly on autonomous and armed local societies.¹⁸ This system (he continues) broke down as a consequence of the growing military power of peripheral peoples and pressure from

¹⁴ Dipankar Gupta, *Rivalry and Brotherhood: Politics in the Life of Farmers in Northern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); M.C. Pradhan, *Political System of the Jats of Northern India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966); though one must confess that faith in the accuracy of the historical traditions Pradhan narrates is shaken by the reproduction of some patently forged letters imputed to the Maratha general Sadāśiva Rāo in the book.

¹⁵ Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul, *Common Lands and Customary Law: Institutional Change in North India over the Past Two Centuries* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), Chapters 1–4.

¹⁶ Bernard S. Cohn, “Structural Change in Indian Rural Society 1596–1885” in *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, Robert E. Frykenberg ed. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 53–120.

¹⁷ Trenchantly set forth in Stein, “Agrarian Integration in South India,” in *Land Control*, Frykenberg ed., 175–216.

¹⁸ Stein terms the political system ‘segmentary’; a concept drawn from the work of Aidan Southall in Africa. Stein has been criticized for drawing on an imperfect analogy with African kingless societies. That debate is not relevant for my purposes.

Islamic incursions from south-central India. These processes generated the Vijayanagara integration that lasted, in increasingly attenuated form, from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century and was characterized by “tributary overlordship.” The final phase was the East India Company’s new order that took shape from 1750 to 1850. It largely depended on the displacement of the warrior elite and collaboration with peaceful, literate, and moneyed groups who were able to manage production and meet the heavy fiscal demands of the Madras government.¹⁹ I shall gratefully draw upon Stein’s conceptual frame, even as I modify the chronological framework and reject the implicit evolutionary model that I find in it.

Stein’s synoptic model built on the work of others, including Y. Subbarayalu. But Subbarayalu and Karashima then jointly and separately published several empirically oriented critiques of Stein. They showed that royal power penetrated much more deeply into the *nāḍu* (village cluster) even under the eleventh-century Chola rulers than Stein’s model would allow. Subbarayalu’s close reading of innumerable inscriptions allowed him to name and map the *nāḍus* in the Chola dominions.²⁰ He proposed that these village clusters were formed “about the nucleus of a common irrigation source like a channel or tank and strengthened perhaps by kinship ties.”²¹ Thus these units were (as R. Champakalakshmi has put it) “peasant micro-regions,” being both economic and ethnic territories.²² Karashima argued that elements of central authority and officialdom were present from a much earlier period, though they were pushed into the background by the intermediate authority of the military chieftains (*nāyakas*) from the fourteenth century on.

The critique undermined the grand synthesis that Stein had proposed by which monadic village-clusters (*nāḍu*) existed as segments of a weak state until broken down by the ruthless military fiscalism of eighteenth-century potentates. The argument advanced further with the appearance of an important discussion of pre-Islamic kingship by Ronald Inden. He

¹⁹ Stein, *ibid.*, 187, 189, 201–203.

²⁰ Y. Subbarayalu, *Political Geography of the Chola Country* (Madras: Department of Archaeology, 1973).

²¹ Y. Subbarayalu, “The Chola State and Society,” in *The State and Society in Medieval India* vol. VII, Part I of *History of Indian Science, Philosophy and Culture in Indian Civilization*, ed. J.S. Grewal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 198.

²² R. Champakalakshmi, “The Study of Settlement Patterns in the Coḷa Period,” [1989] reprinted in *Environmental History of Early India: A Reader*, ed. Nandini Sinha-Kapur (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28.

pointed out that in Burton Stein's *nāḍu*, "relations with institutions outside the *nāḍu* are always external to its own constitution." Stein, he charged, retained a dichotomy of sovereignty, where the upper level is not quite as real as the lower level—one is the level of pragmatic action, the other of ritual. Inden alternatively outlined the idea of the village as a political and military unit controlled by dominant farmers of the Karnāṭa country headed by a village chief (*ur-gāvundā*). But these headmen in turn appear to have met together "under the headship of a locality or district lord, a *nāḍ-prabhu* or *nāl-gāvundā*." Eschewing cultural explanation, Inden sees these bodies as political, fiscal, and military organizations.²³ But as the story of communities as territorial powers told by Inden ends here, one might be left to infer that this political integration ended with the Khalji conquests after 1300 CE. By default, one would join colonial officials in believing that Islamic rule irrevocably destroyed the traditional institutions of the inhabitants, who thereafter lived as powerless and propertyless subjects until rescued by colonial rule. The resonance of this argument with modern Hindutva ideas needs no emphasis.²⁴ The rest of this chapter will attempt to present a different picture.

Not much of the above-cited work, except perhaps that of Stein, had much impact on the larger academic world of South Asian studies. This stemmed in part from the idea that 'authentic' India resided in the Gangetic north—an idea reinforced by the narrative of Aryanism that flourished under colonial rule and has deeply imprinted subsequent scholarship.²⁵ It is necessary to abandon this idea of an authentic center from which peripheral regions diverged. Rather (as I proposed in the Introduction), we must recognize that originally regional political and social movements have often pervaded other areas of the subcontinent without nonetheless homogenizing them.

Hence rather than thinking of social and economic institutions in terms of authentic regions and ancient traditions, it is more useful to think of them as continually reproduced and inherently unstable. We should study institutions through time in terms of the larger forces and contests that may modify them or even freeze them.

In examining social and economic institutions, let us begin by distinguishing peripheral, spatial boundaries from internal, social boundaries.

²³ Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 207–209, 220–223.

²⁴ This critique is found in Suvira Jaiswal, *Caste*, 19.

²⁵ Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Chap. 5.

In this case, we may think of peripheral boundaries as those that generate ethnicity, whereas internal boundaries create a differentiated hierarchy within the bounded community. The historical development of the latter phenomenon is often analyzed as the movement from simple egalitarian bands through ranked societies to formal states. Indian historians have typically formulated this as the transition from tribe to state, and seen it as one-time stage in the social evolution of the subcontinent.

*Explaining the Emergence of Bounded,
Hierarchical Communities and Archaic States*

Barth asks us to consider “what is needed to make ethnic distinctions emerge in an area.”²⁶ I would supplement this by also asking what (besides major natural barriers) creates the “area” within which hierarchies form? In recent history, such areas have been shaped by the emergence of states. Given the instability of larger states in historic South Asia, their repeated collapse and re-founding, we also need to think about the emergence and re-emergence of states, beginning with early or archaic states. But then what do we understand by an archaic state? A conference of leading archaeologists considered this issue, and many agreed that archaic states were societies with at least “two class-endogamous strata (a professional ruling class and a commoner class) and a government that was both highly centralized and internally specialized.” This set them apart from the rank societies that usually preceded them which, in turn, had originated in the development of strata within a smaller, more egalitarian society.²⁷ We should also note that the minimal definition included class endogamy as a marker of early state formation—that practice is of course, still the major indicator of caste boundaries.

So territorial bounding and internal stratification had to proceed alongside each other. In other words, the caste-hierarchy and the village-cluster or locality grew up together: the one created a social boundary, the other a spatial one. Inequality lies at the foundation of complex society; extreme inequality at the base of the early state. Morton Fried sees a continuum

²⁶ Fredrik Barth, “Introduction” to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 17.

²⁷ Joyce Marcus and Gary M. Feinman, eds., *Archaic States* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1998), Editorial introduction, 4–5. For analytic descriptions of these terms see Morton H. Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1975).

between them, with stratified society needing either to move back to a simpler organization or to develop specialized instruments of coercion, that is, the state.²⁸ Given the distinct worsening in relative (and sometimes absolute) conditions of life for the bulk of the population that resulted from state formation, the obvious question is why societies were drawn onto that path. Fried argues that the question itself assumes an unhistorical choice—he suggests institutions took shape under pressure of circumstances *before* they were perceived as representing a new formation. At that point closure had occurred, and escape was difficult.²⁹

It is here that the sociologist Michael Mann's effort to theorize the emergence of early complex societies offers useful ideas. Drawing on the archeologists, he begins by defining society as a complex network of social interaction—a human society marked by intensive internal interaction and a degree of “closure” to other humans. That, by itself, would not generate hierarchy within this network. After all, migration and flight have long been the recourse of the discontented in South Asia and elsewhere. The populations of early civilizations were small, and there were many refuge zones and alternative subsistence niches available to the unhappy. Networks of different sorts were extensive even before the Neolithic period. Equally, different networks encompassed different places—a trade network might not match a marriage network, for example, nor might either of them coincide with a seasonal foraging territory. This would not matter when all societies are at a similar levels of stratification, but becomes important when we consider levels of complexity that generate inequality, culminating in early states. Mann deals with the boundary definition problem by emphasizing the process of interactional network *closure* as the crucial element in allowing hierarchies of power and privilege to develop. He defines a ‘society’ as

a network of social interaction at the boundaries of which is a certain level of interaction cleavage between it and its environment. A society is a unit with boundaries, and it contains interaction that is relatively dense and stable.

That cleavage at the boundary minimizes opportunity and desire for dispersion; it creates what Mann calls the “social cage.”³⁰ Under these con-

²⁸ Fried, *Political Society*, 229–230.

²⁹ “Why have people permitted themselves to be seduced, bilked, murphied, or otherwise conned into relinquishing a condition of egalitarianism for one of inequality?” Fried, *Political Society*, 183.

³⁰ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 13, 38 emphasis original.; also Chapter 3, titled “The Emergence of Stratification, States, and Multi-Power-Actor Civilization in Mesopotamia.”

straints, internal networks grow more important and more meaningful for participants. This makes secession more difficult and enables stratification to develop. That, in turn, creates a political-economic arena within which the beneficiaries of the process work to further focus social action within its boundaries. These arenas may then become endogamous territories of the type I have pointed out in the Indian subcontinent. The early impetus toward such bounding, Mann suggests, came out of ecological limits to Neolithic farming, but then intensified into the great transformation that generated the first states. The process can however halt at a rudimentary stage or, indeed, collapse even after reaching an advanced level.³¹ As historians and archaeologists have always known and political scientists are discovering, it is not uncommon for states to fail as their component institutions fall apart or into disuse.³²

In South Asia, those states for which we have legible written evidence appeared a thousand years after the earliest urban civilization had devolved into regional village cultures. The first surviving political texts were written yet later by learned men in highly evolved secondary states. As Thomas Trautmann has persuasively argued, their thoughts were systematized in the early centuries of the Current Era into the encyclopedic treatise entitled the *Arthaśāstra* (the 'science of politics') attributed to Kauṭilya, a minister of the Maurya empire (which ruled c. 320–187 BCE).³³ We find in this work clear indications of the existence of Mann's bounded communities: they are referred to as *janapada*, which literally translates as the 'foothold of a people.' The text contains many terms describing various levels of an (ideal) administrative hierarchy from the village up to a *janapada* comprising some hundreds of villages. Many of the terms in the *Arthaśāstra* text are not attested in Maurya or near-Maurya period inscriptions. But the term *janapada* is indeed found in Maurya records and for centuries thereafter. Each *janapada* clearly had a principal city or cities, and the inhabitants collectively are referred to as *paura-janapada* or 'citizens and rustics.'³⁴

³¹ Fried, *Political Society*, 182–184; Joseph A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³² Fried, *Political Society*, 231; Joyce Marcus, "The Peaks and Valleys of Ancient States: An Extension of the Dynamic Model," 59–94.

³³ Thomas R. Trautmann, *Kauṭilya and the Arthaśāstra* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), "In its impersonal and abstract way, it sums up ancient Indian beliefs about the state with an authority which no individual creation could possess," 187.

³⁴ I am drawing here from the admirable chronological appendix compiled by S.C. Mishra, in his book *Evolution of Kauṭilya's Arthaśāstra: An Inscriptional Approach* (Delhi: Anamika Publications, 1997), 213–241.

The *Arthaśāstra* is very much a centralizing, royalist text; its description of the *janapada* begins with its founding at the initiative of the king, who settles thousands of farming households in village clusters in an organized way, peopling them with settlers from overpopulated regions of his territory or forcibly deporting them from elsewhere. Ashoka's own inscription reports that fifty thousand people were forcibly deported after his conquest of the kingdom of Kalinga (in modern Orissa, eastern India). But it is unlikely that such movements into virgin land could be successfully achieved without a strong underlying organization among the people of the new *janapada*. Nor does it seem likely that royal fiat was the commonest way that such combinations of land and people were formed. It is more likely that many of these footholds first took shape as tribal or petty monarchical territories. Later imperial regimes were layered over them, but the underlying units were early examples of bounded, stratified territories in South Asia. In the fourth century BCE, many such bounded states, each centered on a small stronghold, were described as existing alongside larger territories in the Greek narratives of Alexander's invasion of Afghanistan and the Indus valley (327–326 BCE). Indeed, when we consider the lists of the sixteen "great *janapadas*" transmitted in the Buddhist tradition, we notice that several of them were clearly tribal territories named after the dominant community, whereas others were monarchies.³⁵

Monarchies slowly came to predominate. The transition from rank society to monarchical state is depicted in a chapter of the *Arthaśāstra*, where the strength of such egalitarian tribal communities (*saṃgha*) is described as lying in their cohesion. Gaining their allegiance (it advises) is more valuable than adding an additional army or ally, because their cohesion makes them indomitable. Their support should (the text advises) be obtained by pleasing discourse and gifts (*sāma-dāna*) and their hostility quelled by intrigue and force (*bheda-daṇḍa*).³⁶ If they are hostile, the king whom they threaten is advised to incite their lower ranks to demand ceremonial status, that is, connubial and commensal relations on par with the higher ranks. Alternatively, he could use agents to set the principal men at odds with each other.³⁷ Clearly these communities are visualized as having moved beyond being mere rank societies to politically organized, indeed aristo-

³⁵ J.P. Sharma, *Republics in Ancient India c. 1500 B.-500 B.C.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 169.

³⁶ R.P. Kangle, ed., *The Kauṭīlīya Arthaśāstra* second edition [1969] reprint (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000) Part I: Sanskrit text, 11.1.1–3.

³⁷ Kangle, *ibid.*, 11.1.6–13.

cratic proto-states.³⁸ The refusal of intermarriage and commensality would obviously split the tribe into castes. So would migration, forced or voluntary. Many of the ethnonyms occurring in this section of the *Arthaśāstra* were applied to groups known through the centuries as regionally dominant "tribal" communities. They are divided into two classes: those who live as warrior-bands (*kṣatriya-śreṇī*); these are Kāmboja, Surāṣṭra etc. The former is identifiably in the north-western Panjab hills and the latter in western Gujarat. Then there are those who live by using the name 'king' (*rājā*). Interestingly, the latter are communities of the central Indo-Gangetic plain and, perhaps because they had been reduced to privileged but tributary status, have the derogatory suffix *ka* added to their ethnonyms (for example *Vṛjjika*, *Licchivika* clearly refer to the famous Vajji confederacy and Licchavi clan of the sub-Himalayan region).³⁹ Privileged but subordinate: this suggests an analogy with later dominant rural-warrior groups of the same areas usually termed Rājput (son of a *rājā*) who scorned farm labor and sought to live on rent and tribute.⁴⁰ Finally, we should note that when recalcitrant *saṁghas* had been split by guile, the conquered should be settled as farmers in separate groups of five or ten households each, because if allowed to live together they would be capable of armed revolt. They might also be posted on frontiers.⁴¹ Such processes would scatter ethnically distinct groups among the larger population and thus induce caste-formation.⁴² Interestingly, the *Mahābhārata* contains an entire chapter addressing the problem from the tribe's point of view almost as a rejoinder to the *Arthaśāstra*. Here the wise Bhīṣma is asked how a *gaṇa* could flourish and he emphasizes the danger of internal rifts, of whisperings and jealousies which finally drive them into the power of the enemy. On the other hand, if they maintain their traditions and always consult each other, they will gain wealth through their united manly strength as outsiders seek their friendship.⁴³ It is

³⁸ Fried, *Political Society*, Chapters 4 & 5.

³⁹ Kangle, *Arthaśāstra*, 11.11.4–5.

⁴⁰ John T. Hitchcock, "The Idea of the Martial Rājput," in *Traditional India*, Singer, ed., (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959), 10–17. See also Chapter 5, pp. 156–157, on 'caste rates'.

⁴¹ Kangle, *Arthaśāstra*, 11.11.17–19.

⁴² For an excellent field-tested typology from southern India, see Brenda F. Beck, "Centers and Boundaries of Regional Caste Systems: Toward a General Model," Chapter 10 in *Regional Analysis: volume II—Social Systems*, Carol A. Smith, ed. (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 255–288, 265–266.

⁴³ *The Śāntiparvan being the Twelfth Book of the Mahābhārata, the Great Epic of India*, Critically edited by S.K. Belvalkar (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1961) Chapter 108, v. 7–8, 15–19.

also likely that the deep history of such processes of conquest and division in the rich core lands of the central Gangetic plain resulted in the gradual breakdown of structures of self-governance evidenced in the Buddhist records as well as the *Arthaśāstra*, leaving only the pargana lords or *zamindars* of the Mughal-era record that we shall consider later in this chapter.

They persisted longer in other regions, especially in peninsular India. In the second millennium the village clusters included a number of villages—from a score to over a hundred—and had stable institutions of governance. *Janapada* was no longer used except by the learned; among the commonest names we find in general use were *nāḍu* in southern India, *deśa* and *pargana* elsewhere. The best translation of all three might be “county,” as long as we think of the tenth-century county controlled by the hereditary count at the head of the local militia (*posse comitatus*) rather than the staid Hanoverian administrative unit. A persuasive picture of its structure is drawn by Ronald Inden, who sought to connect local territorial dominance with kingly power through the intermediate unit of the *janapada* controlled by a dominant caste. This caste comprised “the citizenry par excellence,” tied to the Rashtrakuta emperors through nested systems of military service and fealty to district and provincial heads.⁴⁴ Thus the classical Sanskrit *janapada*—people with territory—is recognizable in later history under other names. The question however, is why did it survive at all when it presented obvious obstacles to royal power? I address this in the next section.

The Persistent Tribe

In order to broach this matter, we need to abandon ideas of linear social progress. We must remember that if the tribe was fragile in the face of the state, the dynastic state was also a frangible object. The turmoil of conquest periodically renewed and re-energized dominant castes or *saṁghas*; that in turn revitalized the village-cluster even as they reshaped its boundaries and social order. The first appearance of the early historic county (*janapada*) would seem to lie in what some historians of ancient India have characterized as a one-way evolutionary transition from egalitarian tribes to hierarchical states and castes. Thus D.D. Kosambi and R.S. Sharma viewed many

⁴⁴ Inden, *Imagining India*, 219.

endogamous castes as originating in the incorporation, by acculturation and conquest, of various tribal communities across the Indian subcontinent.⁴⁵ Working within the broad tradition of Marxist historical anthropology, D.D. Kosambi saw the tribe as a pre-state stage of social organization characterized by a comparatively primitive agricultural system and an inferior intellectual range when compared with the agrarian order of imperial states like the Maurya.

The American school of social anthropology also tended to place tribe as a phase in the continuum from egalitarian band to archaic state. So the band was egalitarian, the tribe ranked, the chiefdom stratified, and the state autocratic.⁴⁶ But the analytic value of using the term “tribe” as a pre-state stage has been contested; similarly, Kosambi’s theory that caste endogamy originated in a tribal practice conserved through the ages is entirely speculative. The political anthropologist Morton Fried argued that tribes, rather than being a stage *before* the state, emerge out of simpler organizations *because of* the dangers and opportunities afforded by the emergence of states.⁴⁷ Certainly even last-ditch defenders of the concept of tribe as a “stage of cultural evolution,” such as the distinguished Indian archaeologist Shereen Ratnagar, accept that in “later periods of history the tribe co-existed with stratified societies ruled by monarchies.”⁴⁸ This is, in fact, what we find in the historical record: the rest of her argument is unsupported by evidence. New tribes and tribal territories marked by ethnic

⁴⁵ D.D. Kosambi, “The Basis of Ancient Indian History (I),” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 75 (1955): 36–38; Sharma, *Śūdras*, 226–228.

⁴⁶ As might be expected, there is an immense literature on these issues. A conference that analyzed the issue in global perspective produced the volume edited by Steadman Upham, *The Evolution of Political Systems: Sociopolitics in Small-Scale Sedentary Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). The foreword by Jonathan Haas comments that despite the effort to steer away from typology, the “chapters deal largely with what would traditionally be called tribes and simple chiefdoms,” xvi.

⁴⁷ Morton H. Fried, *The Notion of Tribe* (Menlo Park, CA: Cummings, 1975), see Chapter 12 “The Tribe as a Secondary Phenomenon”.

⁴⁸ “Ideally and originally” (her terminology) it was a stage when relations of production were enfolded in kinship and land, water, pastures and forests held in common. Shereen Ratnagar, *Being Tribal* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2010), 2–3. There is no evidence for this ‘ideal and original’ phase which is obviously drawn from Engels (minus his requirement of group marriage). Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* translated by Ernest Untermann (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co. Cooperative, 1902), 39–44. In fact, the peasant villages of colonial-era Panjab would come closest to conforming to the community restriction on land alienation and kin-based membership of Ratnagar’s model. See Chakravarty-Kaul, *Common Lands*, for an account of this.

hierarchy on the pattern of Barth's Swat Pathans have repeatedly emerged in South Asia and its borderlands. Sometimes they have founded new states; at others repelled or even destroyed them.

Nor, indeed, can extant tribes be the fossil remnants of ancient organizations. Social institutions live only if they function; fossils by definition are dead. It is my argument that the tribe as a reactive, defensive and offensive political organization never vanished even if particular tribes did. Here I follow global anthropological usage of the term "tribe," meaning thereby large, stratified sociopolitical organizations characterized by diffused authority and collective leadership such as (for example) a council of important chiefs—the *mukhyāh* of the Indian political literature.⁴⁹ The tribe as a political organization persistently revived and created territories similar to the old *janapada*. Let us consider the Swat Pathans of northwest Pakistan, for instance. This long-settled agrarian region was conquered in the sixteenth century by ancestors of the present Yusufzai lineages. Through to the twentieth century, "landholding Pakhtun proprietors represented only the dominant part of the shallow hierarchies of the village." They controlled dependent castes of tenants, artisans, and traders. They created a system of labor-service centered on each landowner, and the collective of landowners both defended the territory and enforced social hierarchy within it.⁵⁰ Swat had known of monarchy from at least the Achaemenid emperors of the late sixth century BCE. But it remained a tribal *janapada* two thousand years later.

Therefore, as Ibn Khaldun noted six centuries ago, we must not assume that monarchy is a somehow superior form that inevitably triumphed in history. The cohesion and energy that he remarked as characteristic of the tribe, which was often missing in the city, could indeed burst forth to overthrow and found kingdoms. Barth has reminded us that

⁴⁹ For descriptions of such tribal polities, see for example Barth, *Political Leadership*; for an excellent comparative account of North Africa and South Asia see David M. Hart, *Qabila: Tribal Profiles and Tribe-State Relations in Morocco and on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Frontier* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2001). The political import of tribe-state relations is much in the news at the time of writing, as tribes and tribal loyalty are invoked from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya.

⁵⁰ Robert Nichols, *Settling the Frontier: Land, Law and Society in the Peshawar Valley, 1500–1900* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7; Barth, *Political Leadership among the Swat Pathans*; elsewhere Barth writes "the institution which provides a corporate expression of the local dominant caste is simply a plenary assembly of all its members; this assembly simultaneously constitutes the governing body of the whole local community." "Social Stratification in Swat", 126–127.

the Middle East is the homeland of states and empires; it has known centralized political systems far longer than any other region of the world The tribal peoples that are found in the region do not retain their tribal institutions through ignorance, but as a stable and successful adaptation to the natural and social environment in which they find themselves.⁵¹

So it is not surprising that the Indian subcontinent has had a long history of such interaction. Tribes, tribes transformed to dominant castes, and monarchies have all coexisted through the centuries in South and West Asia.⁵² Tribes have come into being and disintegrated, just as kingdoms have done. A number of kingless peoples were reportedly conquered by Alexander of Macedon and presumably by the Maurya emperors. Yet similar groups reconstituted themselves into the first millennium CE, as indicated by epigraphic references and some remaining coins that refer to such communities.⁵³ This re-emergence supports my argument that these processes periodically renewed and re-energized the tribal *janapada*, even as they reshaped its boundaries and social order. In the course of time, some might move from aristocracy to autocracy and form the nucleus of empires that would in turn break down.

We lack much evidence on how the early Iron Age tribes in India took shape. But we have better evidence of dominant fraternities being shaped out of "conquest movements" in the second millennium CE. Several important cases pertain to northeastern India.⁵⁴ For a comparative trans-Asian perspective, we refer to the erudite survey of tribes and states from Morocco to Iran by Ira Lapidus. Lapidus notes that fragmented rural populations were repeatedly organized into conquest movements (usually based in a religious community) in which kinship among the leaders was a secondary phenomenon. The most common form of leadership, he notes, was the warrior chieftaincy supported by a lineage, clan, or war band that in turn won the allegiance of other such warrior units—again, often using bonds of religion—and thereby dominated a subject population. "Tribes were in

⁵¹ Barth, *Political Leadership*, 133–134.

⁵² The South Asian case will be discussed here. For the West Asian case see Philip M. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), especially Ira M. Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History," 25–47.

⁵³ R.C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India* 3rd revised edition (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1969), 244–270.

⁵⁴ See J.B. Bhattacharjee, "Dimasa State Formation in Cachar," in *Tribal Politics and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North-eastern India*, ed. Surajit Sinha (Calcutta: Centre for Studies in the Social Sciences, 1987).

effect the creatures of religious or political elites." Genealogical claims (he adds) were important for self-image, but not in the actual organization of the larger movements.⁵⁵

Examples of such processes come to mind in the latter days of one of India's major empires, the Mughals. We may think of military brotherhoods of supposed tribal origin like the Bangash Pathans or the Rohillas of the eighteenth century as illustrating Lapidus' phenomenon, wherein a combination of adherents to a religious ideology and members of successful war bands created an elite that was installed over a larger subject population. When conquest brought productive agricultural land under their control, this elite would usually become a landlord stratum that displayed its status by taking wives from but not giving them to other groups.⁵⁶ They also sought to extirpate all other landlord claims beneath them. The area north-east of Delhi, for example, is now known as Rohilkhand after the Rohilla Afghan elite that, in the eighteenth century, displaced the local Katehriya Rajput gentry that had tenaciously resisted the power of Delhi from the thirteenth century onward. The Rohillas in turn, maintained the local tradition of resistance to central power into the British colonial period. The Rohillas had themselves been assembled into a 'tribal' community out of various Afghan war bands and local slaves drawn into the following of Daud Khan, a horse-trader turned soldier of fortune.⁵⁷ Another similar group, the Bangash, evolved more quickly toward kingship and even made a bid for the dominion of Awadh.⁵⁸

In more arid and unproductive areas, hierarchies resulting from conquest were 'shallower'; that is, not all victors could live under the name of *rājā*. In the mid-nineteenth century, for example, S.S. Thorburn had occasion to closely examine the customs and history of conquering tribesmen when he settled land tenures and taxes in the Bannu district, straddling

⁵⁵ Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History," 28–30.

⁵⁶ Rita Brara observes that in consonance with "the unidirectionality of bride-giving among the Hindu elite" the Afghan ruling family of Malerkotla (now in the Indian Panjab), deployed the conception of bride-givers being inferior to bride takers. Rita Brara, "Kinship and the Political Order: The Afghan Sherwani Chiefs of Malerkotla," reprinted in *Muslim Communities of South Asia* 3rd edition, T.N. Madan ed. (Delhi: Manohar, 2001), 429–431.

⁵⁷ Jos Gommans, *The Rise of Indo-Afghan Empire c. 1710–1780* [1995] Indian edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 113–133; S.M. Moens, *Report on the Settlement of the Bareilly District of the North-West Provinces* (Allahabad: N-W P Government Press, 1874), 23–34, 112; Charles Hamilton, *Historical Relation of the Origin Progress and Final Dissolution the Government of the Rohilla Afgans [sic] in the Northern Provinces of Hindostan* (London: G. Kearsley, 1787), 42–44.

⁵⁸ Gommans, *Indo-Afghan Empire*, 128–132.

the river Indus in today's northwest Pakistan. He commented that Pathan tribes divided "new acquisitions on some established equitable principle, e.g. ancestral shares or number of mouths or families in each Khel [lineage segment]." ⁵⁹

The rise of the Sikhs in the eighteenth century is another example of the phenomenon described by Lapidus; in this case, a conquest movement arose out of a religious community. The Englishman George Forster observed the Sikhs closely in the late eighteenth century, and wrote that their government "bears an appearance of aristocracy; but a closer examination discovers a large vein of popular power branching through many of its parts." ⁶⁰ His judgment is confirmed by the latest historical research. Purnima Dhavan notes that the Khalsa Sikhs remained more strongly resistant to hierarchy than any other contemporary warrior group and emergent rulers still periodically acknowledged the egalitarian claims of the Khalsa in gatherings such as the *gurmata*. ⁶¹ Some fifteen hundred years earlier, the Yaudheya (a name that may mean "warriors," just as the Khalsa Sikh title Singh means "lion") had formed a long-lasting confederacy in the arid plains between the Indus and the Ganges. Like the Yaudheya, the Sikhs issued a common currency despite their political divisions. ⁶² The Sikhs were drawn from many agrarian communities but were held together by a single creed—just what Lapidus found to be the usual basis of conquest movements across the Middle East. ⁶³ The idea of common conquest and tribal lordship has sometimes been viewed as a culture trait of the Afghans, but it recurred among the Sikhs, who were largely drawn from the peasant communities of the Panjab. ⁶⁴ This was also recorded by the early nineteenth-century observer Prinsep:

⁵⁹ Septimus S. Thorburn, *Report on the Regular Land Revenue Settlement of the Bannu District effected by Mr. S.S. Thorburn* (Lahore: Central Jail Press, 1879) note on 16; he also cites examples from his own observation.

⁶⁰ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England, through the Northern Part of India, Kashmere, Afghanistan, Persia and into Russia by the Caspian-Sea*. 2 vols. (London: R. Faulder, 1798, 1808), 1: 328–330.

⁶¹ Purnima Dhavan, *When Sparrows Became Hawks: The Making of the Sikh Warrior Tradition, 1699–1799* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 174–175.

⁶² Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, 256–259; Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1978), 36.

⁶³ Lapidus, "Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History," 30.

⁶⁴ McKim Marriott noted this in an early paper. "The loose structure of a misal [Sikh war-band] with its emphasis on equality, mobility and inspired warfare, was a radical departure from the settled structure of peasant society: it was rather the structure of a peasant militia." "Village Structure and the Punjab Government: A Restatement," *American Anthropologist* vol. 55, 1 (1953): 142.

When the Misuls [Sikh war bands] acquired their territorial possessions, it became the first duty of the chiefs to partition out the lands, towns, and villages amongst those who considered themselves as having made the conquest *shamil* or in common. Every *Surkurda* or leader of the smallest party of horse that fought under the standard of the Misul demanded his share in proportion to the degree in which he had contributed to the acquisition.⁶⁵

The Sikh *misl* or stable war band was an embryonic tribe; the *Arthaśāstra* might have called it a *śreṇī*. New clan territories and village clusters developed in its territory, like the Sahota village cluster that Tom Kessinger found in the 1960s.⁶⁶ Around Delhi, the contemporary visitor, de Modave noted in 1775,

there are many large villages in favourable positions and easy to defend. The peasants of the neighbouring villages have abandoned their hamlets in order to retire to these villages. They have formed a common Council which governs all their public affairs. They recognize neither the usurpers nor the legitimate masters of the province; they only pay when they are forced to do it, some money to save their crops.⁶⁷

Each such phase renewed the vitality of the *janapada* institution under a new name, with new boundaries. But in the early modern era, Sikh or other war bands could not long endure without acquiring the appurtenances of contemporary warfare—Western-style infantry and professional artillery. This forced militant fraternities to either become military-fiscal states or succumb to them. Cash revenues began to accrue to the central treasuries; even where the old sharers (termed *paṭṭidār*) in the original conquests were not ousted, their military obligations were standardized and extra fees collected. John Lawrence, the first British administrator of the former Sikh lands, wrote in 1847 that Maharaja Ranjit Singh had been “gradually resuming all the lands of all the descendants of the conquering class ...”⁶⁸ New regular military units paid directly from the treasury replaced the semi-autonomous contingents that had first established Sikh power in north-western India. The resulting military-fiscal regime was conquered only with a full-scale mobilization of the military resources of the mature East India Company state in South Asia.

⁶⁵ Henry T. Prinsep, Compiler, *Origin of the Sikh Power in the Punjab and the Political Life of Muha-Raja Runjeet Singh*, from a report by Captain William Murray, late Political Agent at Umbala and from other sources (Calcutta: G.H. Huttman, Military Orphan Press, 1834), 33.

⁶⁶ Tom G. Kessinger, *Vilayatpur: 1848–1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 39–40.

⁶⁷ Comte de Modave, cited in Muhammad Umar *Muslim Society in Northern India during the Eighteenth Century* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998), 195 n. 310.

⁶⁸ Cited in Indu Banga, *Agrarian System of the Sikhs*, 135, note 69.

British colonial rule and the new state that it built put an end to the war-band process of state formation in Panjab for the time being and, as we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, ultimately dissolved the *janapada*. Caste or tribe expansion had not been confined to the troubled land of the five rivers. Displacement and conquest had continued under the surface of the *pax Mughaliana*. Ramphal Rana's painstaking archival work has shown this at work in the very heartland of the Mughal Empire—the provinces of Agra and Delhi during the seventeenth-century heyday of imperial power.⁶⁹ He also shows how the efforts of the aristocratic house of Jaipur to use clan loyalty to develop the basis of a centralized state stirred up intense resistance by other Rajputs and especially by local peasant communities. Iqtidar Alam Khan has shown that in the eighteenth century peasant insurgents in the region frequently had serviceable muskets. When deployed behind mud walls or thickets, they could seriously deter troopers on expensive horses.⁷⁰ The Jaipur effort at aggrandizement finally failed and that hapless state was the perennial prey of Maratha and Pathan warlords in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Blocs of armed peasants such as the Jats and cognate Panjabi communities who joined the Sikh movement expanded their power steadily across the north Indian plain. This infusion of strength may then have generated the elaborate and extensive structures of community political organization evidenced among the Jāt peasantry in the nineteenth and twentieth century and studied by Pradhan and Gupta. Were these councils the innovations of an expanding ethnic bloc or residues of earlier organization? It is hard to say, though British records show the existence of strong supra-village organizations among dominant landed groups such as the Rajputs, Jāts, and Gujars during the revolt of 1857–1858.⁷¹ Only the protracted efforts of the colonial administration and the great disarmament after the suppression of the 1857 revolt could break these down into orderly castes.⁷²

So even while older Rajput domains lost vigor under Mughal hegemony in north India, newly insurgent peasantries, such as the Jāts of the western Gangetic plain and the Sikhs in Panjab, carved out new warrior lordships

⁶⁹ Ramphal Rana, *Rebels to Rulers: The Rise of Jat Power in Medieval India c. 1665–1735* (Delhi: Manohar, 2006).

⁷⁰ Iqtidar Alam Khan, "Muskets and Peasant Resistance" in *Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 164–190.

⁷¹ Eric Stokes, "Traditional Elites in the Great Rebellion of 1857: Some Aspects of Rural Revolt in the Upper and Central Doab," in *Elites in South Asia*, Edmund Leach and S.N. Mukherjee eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 17–32.

⁷² Malavika Kasturi, *Embattled Identities: Rajput Lineages and the Colonial State in Nineteenth-Century North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

some of which made the transition to military-fiscal states. The pressures of renewed local autonomy and state formation compelled the warrior lords to resort to strategies that were fundamentally inimical to tribal solidarity. The military-fiscal states that were rapidly generated thereby consolidated their rule over the warrior-peasants. We began by developing the idea that the bounded network that Michael Mann theorized as the foundation of social stratification became the *janapada* of Indian political theory. It was periodically reshaped down to the nineteenth century. Within any sizeable domain were village clusters (*pargana* etc.). Each such village cluster was the home of a dominant community, which shaped the local agrarian order to support it. The cluster had its own institutions of adjudication and governance managed by the ruling elite of whatever religion. At its center was often a small urban center. Townspeople in cities big and small organized themselves in a similar way, regardless of the sovereign they lived under, as Niels Brimmes showed with a wealth of records from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Tranquebar (Danish), Pondicherry (French) and Madras (English).⁷³ The organization of civil society, then, was based in a caste system rooted in the social stratification of a village cluster or other territorial domain. But it did not disappear with the establishment of supra-local hegemony over these units, even by culturally alien rulers. Let us now consider why this would be the case.

Caste as a Civil Institution

At the beginning of this chapter, it was suggested that we should, following Edmund Leach, consider socioeconomic differentiation in settings where “Hindu kingship” was absent. Moving from south to north, let us do this, commencing with Sri Lanka.

Chapter 1 has already invoked Nur Yalman, who wrote that it “was as if you built the kingdom with bricks and the bricks were castes ...”⁷⁴ Since it was

⁷³ Niels Brimmes, *Constructing the Colonial Encounter: Right and Left Hand Castes in Early Colonial South India* (Richmond Surrey: The Curzon Press, 1999). For North India, see Cohn, “Political Systems in Eighteenth Century India: the Banaras Region,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* vol. 82, 3 (1962): 310–319.

⁷⁴ Nur Yalman, “On Royalty, Caste and Temples in Sri Lanka and South India,” in *Identity, Consciousness and the Past*, H.L. Seneviratne ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997 [re-edited collection from *Social Analysis* no. 25 (September 1989)]), 139–140; “Caste is not merely a convenient way to organize the agrarian economy. It appears to be a political and divine tool useful to kings and gods and not a monopoly of the Brahmins,” 146.

useful to kings, as Yalman wrote, there is no logical reason to suppose that incoming Muslim or Christian rulers would not also find it useful, subject to such modifications as their own religious allegiances might suggest. That was the point made by Susan Bayly with regard to the Christianized fishing caste of south India.⁷⁵ Indeed, a small conquest elite might have even more urgent need of stable patterns of governance as it focused on maintaining its own political dominance. The bricks (to use Yalman's image) would be reused in the new structure.

So, in Sri Lanka, the use of caste as an instrument of government did not change with conquest by the Portuguese or by later, less fanatical Christian regimes. The Dutch who conquered the area at end of the seventeenth century recognized local land tenures and enforced an extensive system of compulsory labor. Villagers who fled to the towns to escape forced labor were compelled return to their lands and to work for the government during three months in the year. To check evasion of the service requirement, they could not "mortgage or sell their lands without leave, and the customs and distinctions of caste were rigorously enforced by penal regulations." The colonial official Colebrooke commented in 1831 on the structure of caste as follows:

The civil institutions of the Cingalese [Sinhala], who profess the religion of Bhood [*sic* Buddha] are obviously derived from Hindu origin. The possession of their lands on tenures of service, and the division of people into classes, according to their various trades or occupations, subsist also among the Malabars [Tamils and Malayalis], and probably prevailed throughout the continent of India before the Mahomedan conquests; but the abolition of the religious distinctions of caste has constituted a marked peculiarity of the Bhoodists The civil distinctions of caste have doubtless originated in an attempt to introduce a division of labour, and these distinctions have been rendered hereditary from the privileges acquired by particular castes, and by the practice of assigning lands for the conditional performance of labour or service.⁷⁶

It goes without saying that the knowledge needed to mobilize specific persons and households as well as the minute supervision needed in a wide range of agricultural and transport labor could only be exercised through caste headmen and the like. This meant that religious affiliation was

⁷⁵ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, 327.

⁷⁶ G.C. Mendis, selected and ed., *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833* 2 volumes (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), Vol. I, 25-29.

irrelevant to the system: Catholics, Buddhists, and Hindus might all be mobilized under it.⁷⁷

Of course this nonetheless leaves open the possibility that, as Colebrooke (and many others) believed, all this changed where Islamic states ruled. The advent of newly Islamicized Central Asian peoples in South Asia certainly changed military balances. The battlefield witnessed small elites of specialized mounted archers dominating much larger masses of unprotected infantry. The evidence for this change in the tactical situation is strong and has been carefully presented by Simon Digby in *War Horse and Elephant*.⁷⁸ One could argue that the introduction of gunpowder weapons in the early modern era enhanced the centralizing effects of this shift and power slipped increasingly into central (and despotic) hands. But there is also evidence that the shift in the tactical balance on the battlefield did not imply the collapse of rural society into a passive and atomized mass. The interests of the new conquerors themselves would have dictated otherwise. First, of course, the maintenance of expensive horses and well-trained soldiers required the regular availability of cash to pay for them. Good horses were scarce in the Indian subcontinent and had to be imported by land and sea at considerable cost. Initial Islamic expansion was fueled by the plunder of the hoarded bullion of towns and temples, but lasting administration required the creation of a routinized system of extraction. Equally important, the numerical weakness of these Turkish elites meant that they soon came to rely on local officials, merchants, and gentry.⁷⁹ It is indeed possible that for the early centuries of Islamic rule, these conquest regimes conceded more autonomy to local bodies and elite collaborators than the more culturally rooted and locally informed Hindu dynasties had done.

The Persian record from Hukkeri in northern Karnataka dating from 1583 demonstrates the extent of local autonomy. It records the fact that great men (*mahājanān*, including the *qāzī* or judge and *khatīb* or prayer leader) and the heads of hereditary functionaries (*balūtīyān*) gathered to

⁷⁷ John D. Rogers, "Caste as a Social Category and Identity in Sri Lanka," *IESHR* 46, 51–78. I have derived many of these ideas from discussions with John Rogers; but responsibility for errors naturally rests with me.

⁷⁸ Simon Digby, *War-Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate* (Oxford: Orient Monographs, 1971); a good discussion of the military aspects of the history of this period is the Introduction to *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000–1800*, Jos Gommans and Dirk H.A. Kolff, eds. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–42.

⁷⁹ Irfan Habib, "Barani's Theory of the History of the Delhi Sultanate," in *Indian Historical Review* vol. VII, nos. 1–2 (1980–1981): 111–112.

support and attest the grant of a field to maintain a water source and a guest house (*mihmān khānā*) built by Mansur Khan. The judge and prayer leader, and possibly the garrison commander (*Sālār jīū*, son of *Tāj al-dīn*)⁸⁰ are listed in the first row of the inscription. By comparison with Marathi versions of such documents, we may see them as comprising the “official” class as distinct from the community. The different community heads were listed below them. It is interesting that no apparent distinction was made between Hindus and Muslims among them. Here we have the headmen of the landowners, followed by the hereditary record keeper (*dīshkulkarnī*), then *Nāiks*—probably chiefs of the local militia who were an important component of fort garrisons under the sultans.⁸¹

If the demands of central authority carried all before them, then it surely would have been unnecessary to secure these additional endorsements. Furthermore, Hukkeri was a strategic town, effectively a provincial capital and the long-time seat of an important Muslim noble family. Had local communities been eclipsed by two centuries under Islamic rule, one would expect that process to be far advanced at a place like this. But they clearly had not been: their sanction was deemed important enough to be recorded even in a grant to an Islamic foundation. By extension, one may infer that such local authorities retained even greater power in the countryside, further removed from the reach of the sultanate. We know that in both Vijayanagara and Bahmani territory, such local organizations could, on occasion, obstruct central authority. Karashima has pointed to the organized protests against royal exaction that hamstrung the former empire in the early fifteenth century.⁸²

Moving further north-west, S.V. Avalaskar also found an important document from the adjoining Nizamshahi kingdom that showed even greater capacity for collective action.⁸³ The people of a village cluster or *pargana* gathered under the hereditary chief, the *desāi*, to protest excessive taxes and fees. Of course, they were not an undifferentiated citizenry: one or more headmen attested to the agreement on behalf of various castes and occupations. This copy was clearly prepared at the Persianate court by a bilingual official. It concluded:

⁸⁰ This may of course be his formal designation ‘Mr. Commander’ rather than personal name.

⁸¹ EIAP 1972, AA Kadiri, “Mahḍar from Hukkeri in Karnataka,” 53 ff.

⁸² Karashima, *Towards a New Formation*, Chapter 8.

⁸³ A partial translation is printed as an appendix to this chapter.

With these as the leaders, everyone, great and small should act together, sending an active householder from each house. This is a matter of common concern and everyone should resolve it together and bear whatever expenditures may be incurred.⁸⁴

Incoming conquerors might also constitute or reconstitute such organizations for their own purposes. A legendary history of the northern Konkan completed in the late sixteenth or seventeenth century records that the previous king was defeated by the invader Nagarsya. All the people of the land gathered together.

The district gentry, their assistants, the village elders, the clever village heads, tax-officers, merchants, Brahmans, all communities brought their records and papers and charters and all came into the royal presence.⁸⁵

Despite all its anachronistic terminology and detail, the narrative captures a real social process—the resettling of a kingdom. We see a similar process at work in a tradition in Goa collected at the beginning of the seventeenth century. This Portuguese document also noted the local recollection that some time before the Portuguese conquest in 1510,

Some external foes conquered the lands of Salcete and compelled the joint village proprietors (*ganvkars*) to pay tribute The proprietors of twelve villages were then organized into a General Assembly (*camara geral*) that would be responsible for the payment of the said tribute by all the villages.⁸⁶

Finally, we can also provide a contemporary rationale for such a process occurring under the East India Company in 1672, soon after the island came under its control. The early English governor of Bombay, Gerald Aungier, decided to arrange a “convention or arrangement with the inhabitants of Bombay regarding their estates.” The original document bore 120 names—all signing as representatives of the people (*povo*). It stipulated the lump sum

⁸⁴ Śā.V. Āvalaskar ed., *Śivacaritrasāhitya* part 9, doc. 9 BISMT 24, 4 (1944), 8–9; see also Avalaskar, *Nāgāva: Ārthika va sāmājika jīvan 1760–1840* (Pune: Gokhale Institute, 1962), 4–6. These forms of protest maintained themselves into the colonial period. British officials seeking to introduce a land revenue survey in Khandesh in 1852 were confronted with mass protests organized by the pargana *deśmukhs* in Raver and Yaval parganas.

⁸⁵ V.K. Rajwade, *Mahikavāṭī cī urf Māhīmācī bakhar* Reprint (Pune: Varada Books, 1999) 41.

⁸⁶ Teotonio R. de Souza, trans., “Portuguese manuscript of c. 1604–1619,” in *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History* (Delhi: Concept, 1979), Appendix I, 218. Such organizations definitely existed and functioned in Portuguese territory well into the nineteenth century. De Souza’s Appendix A-2 contains a ruling (*nem*) of 1604 enacted by the representatives of the eight principal villages of the territory of Tisvadi (all by this time Christians) prohibiting the sale of rights and lands by individual joint proprietors (*ganvkars*) without the consent of the whole body of village proprietors.

that the landholders of the new English colony were to pay for the undisturbed possession of their estates.⁸⁷ The previous year, the President and Council at Surat met to consider the civil administration of the new colony of Bombay. We get a very clear statement of what Colebrooke in Sri Lanka was to call the "civil basis of caste." The East India Company merchants recognized the diversity of Bombay's population and proposed that

in order to preserve the Govern[ment] in constant regular method, free from that confusion which a body composed of so many nations will be subject to, it were requisite [that] [the] severall nations at pres[ent] inhabiting or hereafter to inhabit on the Island of Bombay be reduced or modelled into so many orders or tribes, & that each nation may have a Cheif (*sic*) or Consull of the same nation appointed over them by the Gover[nor] and Councill whose duty & office must be to represent [the] grievances w[hich] Moors of any of the s[aid] nation shall receive from the Christians or any other, also to answer for what faults any of said nation shall committ, [that] the offenders be brought to punishment & that what dutys or fines are due to the Comp[any] may be timely satisfied; his office may be also to determine all Controversys w[hich] may arise between said nation, in case the parties are so agreed, otherwise they are to be brought before the Judge of the Courts of Judicature.⁸⁸

Further east, the Maratha country on the Deccan plateau had deeply rooted institutions analogous to the *nāḍu* gatherings to the south. Thus the local community organized in corporate bodies continued its social, economic, and political life under many different regimes. The names were often Arabicized under the sultanates, but their social role was unaffected.⁸⁹ The functional nature of such organization is demonstrated by an example some two thousand miles to the northeast of Bombay. The conquering Dimasa chiefs of Tibeto-Burman origin were also organizing a multiethnic kingdom in Kachar (part of modern Assam). Immigrant bands of Bengali settlers were allotted territory and divided into self-governing tributary units. Unit representatives gathered periodically for common purposes and were jointly responsible to the kings; gradually the posts became the hereditary possessions of particular families.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ George W. Forrest, *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and Other State Papers Preserved in the Bombay Secretariat—Home Series* 2 vols. (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1887), vol. 1, xvi–xviii and Appendix in vol. 2 (unpaginated).

⁸⁸ Surat, "Letter to Court 5th February 1671," in *Selections*, Forrest vol. 1: 54. I have expanded the abbreviations in the text.

⁸⁹ We shall consider this organization later in this chapter.

⁹⁰ Bhattacharjee, "Dimasa State Formation," 198–199.

In the southern peninsula, collective organizations known as *gotsabhā* (Sanskrit-derived) or *majlis* (Arabic) at the village-cluster and village levels maintained a strong grip on local rights.⁹¹ These community organizations not only presented local grievances to the rulers but, more important, adjudicated disputes around the patrimonial inherited offices labeled *watan* (and occasionally the Sanskrit *vr̥tti*). Tenure of these offices marked status and power within the community, and great and small went to incredible lengths to preserve or acquire these rights. Many spent years of effort and great sums of money, and often did not scruple to kill and die in that pursuit. Some indication of the investment needed for it found in an undated mid-eighteenth century document from western India. It was addressed to the *pargana* chiefs of Sāsvaḍ and promised a grant of 2500 rupees for the forthcoming *got* assembly. They were exhorted to prepare for the assembly of 2000 persons, to strictly instruct the Mahar village servants to supply adequate firewood and to order each household to provide two *man* (150 lbs.?) of flour. Additionally, the butchers should be instructed to provide 25 gelded goats for the feast.⁹² The *gotsabhā* or *majlis* held immense local power over the vital patrimony of great and small alike. This arrangement demonstrates the extent to which local communities organized their life independently of monarchical power. This was recognized even by the centralizing regime of the Maratha king Shivaji in what is today western Maharashtra. Addressing a litigant in 1677–1678, he offered him the choice of having the case decided by the local assembly or sent to another locality for decision or, finally, to be decided by the verdict of the headmen of neighboring villages together with the hereditary functionaries of the village in question.⁹³

The introduction of such assemblies into the narrative leads us directly into the pathbreaking social history embodied in Gune's *Judicial System of the Marathas*.⁹⁴ This work is primarily focused on judicial process but offers many insights into the larger social organization within which legal disputes were embedded, not only in the Marathi-speaking regions but across much of peninsular India. It is important to remember that judicial

⁹¹ See Chapter 3 for an illustration of this.

⁹² Rājārām V. Oturkar ed. *Peśvekālīna Sāmājik va Ārthik Patravayavahāra* (Pune: BISM, 1950), 19.

⁹³ Bhāskar V. Bhaṭ, "Śivakālīna Dharma aṇi vyavahāra," in N.C. Keḷkar and D.V. Aptē eds. *Śivaji Nibandhāvalī I* (Pune: ŚrīŚivacaritra Kāryālaya, 1930), 195–196.

⁹⁴ Vitthala T. Gune, *Judicial System of the Marathas* (Poona: Deccan College Dissertation Series, 1953).

processes functioned in a milieu of chronic small-scale violence as well as periodic outbreaks of war that devastated entire regions. Adjudication was as much a political process directed at restoring balance in local society as a legal one intended to correct objective wrongs. The precarious grip of kingly authority, itself usually threatened by external invasion and internal subversion, meant that localities were left largely to themselves for most of the Vijayanagara-Sultanate period (c. 1350–1700). Patronage to learned Muslims added Islamic judges at most *pargana* headquarters.⁹⁵ The old local assembly was now renamed the *majlis* and headed by the Islamic judge. But these judges soon transformed their offices into hereditary family property and merged into local society.

Records of the working of this assembly (under various names) are found well into the eighteenth century. Gune's inquiry located hundreds of examples; yet more may have perished in the troublous centuries before his study, and others lie unexamined in state and private archives. With this large sample, Gune was also able to analyze the distribution of the records through the centuries. As might be expected, only two specimens dated from before 1500; a larger number survived from the post-Bahmani period, and he analyzed 120 from the next two centuries. In general, vastly more records survive from the eighteenth century than from earlier periods—in large measure thanks to the British acquisition of the undamaged archives of the Pune government in 1818. Papers literally number millions. Yet disproportionately few eighteenth-century *mahajara* (from Persian *mahzar*) or collective attestations were found, and all of these were written between 1701 and 1739—a period when the Maratha government was preoccupied with establishing itself in the declining Mughal Empire and beset by serious internal rivalry. The next seventy years, up to the British conquest, left only two specimens. As Gune remarked, the hereditary prime ministers (*peśvā*) who controlled the kingdom clearly did not favor this judicial form—I suggest because of the autonomy that it conferred on local society. Gune then goes on to note that a reduction in the number during the eighteenth century was due to adjudication having moved increasingly into the hands of local potentates, royal favorites, or specially assembled committees (*pancāyats*).

Interestingly, documents named *mahzar* from the Mughal heartland in north India (and Gujarat) were drastically different: the community solidarity evident in the peninsula was absent. The northern documents were

⁹⁵ Gune, *Judicial System*, 17–18.

produced by gatherings of worthies—often lawyers—who wrote an opinion on a subject or endorsed a resolution to a dispute.⁹⁶ And even in the peninsula, as Gune tells us, community attestations become rarer at a time when other types of documentation exploded. Further south, Noboru Karashima noted that the *nāḍu* assembly was pushed into obscurity in the later Vijayanagara period (after 1565) under the smaller kings (Nayaka) who followed. He observed that in inscriptions from the Tamil district of Chingleput,

the *nattavars*, corporate bodies of leading landholders, were comparatively more conspicuous during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries than in the sixteenth century. They almost cease to appear in inscriptions from the latter half of the fifteenth century.⁹⁷

This is an extremely important observation. Combined with Gune's evidence from the central peninsula, we may see this as a signal of the penetration and disintegration of local society by central authority that marked the early modern period in South Asian history. But even that disintegration did not dissolve all social organization.

The *pargana* assembly was, as our documents illustrated, composed of the chiefs of different segments of the population. As the regional chief (*nāḍ-gavunda*, *deśmukh*, *caudhuri*, etc.) lost his authority, these segments continued to function as sociopolitical organizations. So in 1732, the three 'nations' (*naçoes*) constituting the Hindu population of certain parts of Portuguese India petitioned for the preservation of their ancient laws of inheritance. The 'nations' in question were the Brahmans, Vaniyas, and Goldsmiths.⁹⁸ In present-day Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, John Malcolm around 1818 found strong remnants of such local organization, even as he observed its subversion by the newly dominant Maratha powers or the new fiscal bureaucracy of Zalim Singh in the kingdom of Kotah.

In each of the towns of Central India there is a Zemindar who is considered as the head of the landowners and cultivators; a Chowdry or head of the bunniah or mercantile tribes; and a Mehtur or head of every other class of inhabitants down to the lowest The above persons, who are paid in a share of the land or by dues and fees from their respective tribes, exercise a jurisdiction in their different classes, and settle by their own decision, or by the aid of a Panchayet

⁹⁶ Ziauddin A. Desai, "Mahzar—an Important Source for Administrative History," *Indian Historical Review*, 25 (1998): 16–28.

⁹⁷ Noboru Karashima, *Towards a New Formation: South Indian Society under Vijayanagara Rule* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 111.

⁹⁸ Rivara, *Archivo Portuguez Oriental* Fasc. 6, part 2, 419.

[a council of worthies], all disputes that they can adjust without reference to the officers of Government.⁹⁹

These 'tribal' leaders were the Islamic judge on behalf of the Muslims and the headmen of the businessmen and landowners.¹⁰⁰ Central India, like urban Gujarat and Rajasthan at this time, was a place where businessmen were politically and economically important. There is no doubt why they were separately represented. This tradition persisted. When an elective Karachi Municipality was set up in 1856, electoral rules were framed so as to ensure that each important guild or fraternity obtained the right of electing its representative or representatives.¹⁰¹

Coming to northern India, Ibn Battuta in the 1330s reported that from north India that even in the vicinity of the capital, direct state authority did not penetrate below the group of a hundred villages, each of which had a fixed tax assessment. Its internal structures are left obscure. Ibn Battuta received two and half villages, which were assessed at 5,000 dinars. Towns also were divided into 'hundreds' each of which also had a Hindu headman and a tax-collector.¹⁰² Thus the urban pattern of caste-based residential clustering was definitely present and likely pre-dated the Turkish conquests. It had the same administrative value for all rulers and we find eighteenth-century tax rolls in the city of Pune maintained along caste-community lines, probably with information supplied by headmen.¹⁰³ Interestingly, if a member of one *khūm* sold a house outside the community the transaction attracted special scrutiny and record. So for example, the wife of Honapā Jain (*sic*) sold her house to Bhikājī knife-grinder; the house-tax was transferred to the latter's community.¹⁰⁴ The more stable and centralized Mughal Empire had reached beyond these intermediaries, but still accommodated them within its governance structure. But the Sultanate-Mughal

⁹⁹ John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India* vol. 1: 555–556.

¹⁰⁰ John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India* vol. 1: 558, footnote (in the original all the names were printed in upper case).

¹⁰¹ Shaw Stewart, speaking on N-W P Municipal Committees Act of 1869, in *Abstract of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor General of India* (6 March 1868), 125.

¹⁰² Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta 1325–1354* vol. III, H.A.R. Gibb, trans. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1999), 740.

¹⁰³ Innumerable such documents have survived in the MSA Pune, especially *Jamav* section. See for example Rūmal no. 171, doc. 49120.

¹⁰⁴ MSA Pune, *Jamav* section, Rūmal 171, I-592; see docs. in 7234 series which has several entries of such transfers. See also the case of Govinda whose house-tax had to be paid by the potter community to which he belonged.

heartland of the Indo-Gangetic plain lacks evidence of structured and recognized *pargana* organizations of the type we have described for the south. We know, however, that the dominant local gentry were organized in ethnic groups on a pattern with recognizable similarities to the aristocratic tribal *janapada* we have already discussed. Nurul Hasan described this:

Practically the entire country was under the jurisdiction of one or the other types of intermediary zamindars [rural lords] The fact that in the majority of the parganas the zamindars belonged to a single caste and also that persons of the same caste were zamindars of many contiguous parganas suggests that certain families or clans held zamindari rights over large tracts.¹⁰⁵

Irfan Habib similarly commented on the presence of “well-marked blocks of territory each consisting of a single *pargana* or group of *parganas* under the *zamindari* [lordship] of members of the same caste.”¹⁰⁶ Such landholders had armed followings and maintained one or more forts in the territory they dominated. The empire sought to use this structure to bolster its own authority. Charles Elliot found that under the Mughals, the *caudhuri* (headman of the *pargana*) was always selected from the prominent landed families of the locality and served as their representative and head.¹⁰⁷ As Moreland pointed out in 1938, these men were in fact equivalent to the southern *deśmukhs* or *nāḍgaudās*, lesser kings with considerable though varying authority.¹⁰⁸ We cannot, however, tell if formal structures of representation similar to the peninsular ones existed beneath these little kings. So we cannot point to good evidence of local assemblies during much of the second millennium. It is not impossible that the strongly organized locality was a unique feature of southern India, like the Dravidian kinship system that (as a major study by Thomas Trautmann has demonstrated) extended well into Maharashtra.¹⁰⁹ It is also possible that the processes of state building, centralization of military power, and commercialization of rights had simply advanced further in the north than in the peninsula. The evidence available precludes an answer at the moment. But it is impor-

¹⁰⁵ S. Nurul Hasan, “Zamindars under the Mughals,” in *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History*, R.E. Frykenberg ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 24–25.

¹⁰⁶ Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* 1999 ed., 198–199.

¹⁰⁷ C.A. Elliott, *The Chronicles of Oonao, a District in Oudh* (Allahabad: Mission Press, 1862), 112–114.

¹⁰⁸ W.H. Moreland, “The Pargana Headman (Chaudhri) in the Mogul Empire,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (October 1938): 511–521.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

tant to recognize that several macro-regions coalesced into South Asian civilization without losing all their original traits thereby. Marriott in the 1950s commented on the relative simplicity of caste ranking in north India and connected it with the absence of a single resident landlord or coparcenary caste group, like those found in the Tamil south, who might be the focus of ranking behavior. It should be noted that religious organization was likewise decentralized and there was no tradition of obligatory ranked participation like that found in southern India.¹¹⁰

Markets in Power

The early modern epoch in South Asia, as elsewhere, was marked by increased commercialization and the development of a range of active markets in goods, people, military manpower, and political access. Everywhere this occurred, rural power holders inevitably became active participants in this commercialization.¹¹¹ This was also true in peninsular India.¹¹² In all these regions, buying and selling of superior land rights begin to be recorded from at least the sixteenth century.¹¹³ Shares in lower village offices and lands were similarly entering the market. The sale or mortgage of their estates was the last resort of gentry and peasant families in difficult times.¹¹⁴ Many deeds of sale from the sixteenth century onward described how either the pressure to pay arrears of tax or simply survival during famine led to the sale. South of the Narmada, such deeds were often attested by the heads of the relevant local community, who thereby concurred in the transaction.¹¹⁵ There are some records of sellers having to spend considerable sums to secure the consent of those with interests in the land as well as that of the village community.¹¹⁶ W.H. Sykes, statistical reporter for the government of Bombay Presidency in the 1820s, collected some of these documents and wrote the

¹¹⁰ Marriott, *Caste Ranking*, 58–59.

¹¹¹ S. Nurul Hasan, "Zamindars under the Mughals," 17–31.

¹¹² Sumit Guha, "Potentates, Traders and Peasants in Eighteenth Century Western India" in Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam eds. *Institutions and Economic Changes in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 71–84.

¹¹³ Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* 1999 ed., 187–191.

¹¹⁴ Ananta R. Kulkarni, *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji* 2nd revised ed. (Pune: Prabha Prakashan, 2002), 71–75.

¹¹⁵ Gune, *Judicial System of the Marathas*, appendix.

¹¹⁶ Kulkarni, *Maharashtra*, 72, cites the case of a headman who had to spend 275 hons or about 800 to 1000 rupees to secure such consent. The latter amount would hire 20 or 25 man-servants for a year.

earliest English account of them. F.W. Ellis in Madras prepared a comprehensive English analysis in his *Answers on Mirasi Right*.¹¹⁷ At the same time as these processes of commercialization injected vital cash into the rural economy, they also began to create openings for the entry of external power and of the various merchant families who had so large a share of it.

These processes fueled the disintegration of community authority. The complaint of the joint proprietors of Tisvadi subdivision (Goa) in 1604 described the reaction of the village proprietors to the transactions by which this penetration by fiscally powerful lords manifested itself.

The poor *ganykars* are allured by the rich and influential outsiders with temptingly large sums of money, and it is made difficult for the village council to exercise its right of pre-emption. The intrusion by these externs has become a source of hatred and disharmony in the villages.¹¹⁸

But the process advanced relentlessly and accelerated in the eighteenth century. This was the third phase of agrarian society in Stein's grand schema. He saw the last centuries before colonial rule as a period where ferocious political competition intensified the processes of 'military fiscalism' throughout the Indian subcontinent. Drawing a parallel with contemporary Europe, he wrote of

absolute monarchies freed from military dependency upon the aristocracies from which the monarchies had emerged, increasingly elaborate bureaucracies the sales of whose offices in France added to the royal treasury, and an increasing tax base [But] in India, royal centralization was opposed by communally organized, localized societies whose ruling strata remained closely linked to local social groups and loyalties over which they extended royal protection. "Little kings," or *rajas*, never attained the legal independence of an aristocracy from both monarchs and the local people whom they ruled.¹¹⁹

Military fiscalism is a valuable concept that we have had occasion to deploy. But Indian society was more entrepreneurial, individualistic, and violent than Stein's relatively static picture would allow. There is certainly abundant evidence that royal power and its allied merchant capital was penetrating more deeply into local society than it had previously; we only have to agree

¹¹⁷ Thomas R. Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Delhi: Yoda Press, 2006), 77; F.W. Ellis, *Replies to Seventeen Questions Proposed by the Government of Ft. St. George Relative to Mirasi Right* (Madras: Gazette Press, 1818).

¹¹⁸ De Souza, *Medieval Goa: A Socio-Economic History*, Appendix A-2, 220.

¹¹⁹ Burton Stein, "State Formation and Economy Reconsidered Part One," *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 3 (1985): 387-413.

that the process may have been evident earlier than Stein thought. We should also remember that there is no reason to view this as an irreversible process. Regimes could also lose personnel and knowledge and move to simpler forms of governance and taxation.

Still, despite efforts such as those of the above-mentioned village proprietors of Tisvadi, the trend toward commercialization and militarization seems to have been irreversible in much of South Asia into the early nineteenth century. The final results may be seen if we look at Tsukasa Mizushima's painstaking study of the distribution of tenurial rights in coastal Tamil Nadu by the mid-eighteenth century. The process of commercialization had resulted in the creation of new village shareholders (termed *mirāsīdārs*) by purchase. Some of them then emerged as village lords and

threw the system fatally off balance and caused its collapse in the late pre-colonial period. Some mirasidars usurped the functions previously born[e] by the mirasi system [of locally bounded tenurial rights] and deconstructed it to their advantage.

There were also by now firmly established parvenu chieftains who controlled hundreds of villages—holdings that disregarded the old *nāḍu* boundaries. The same was true of big temples that often benefited from grants by such chieftains. As Mizushima sums up the long agrarian history of his area of study, the basic unit of socio-economic life had been shifting from a village cluster or *nāḍu* to the village in the late pre-colonial period. At the same time, owners with individual title to a land lot (known as *paṭṭādār*) began to appear under early colonial governance. "Pattadars, the creature of the colonial rule had nothing to do with either the local society or the village."¹²⁰ The colonial governments exploited and intensified the process of village disintegration in order to enhance their own authority. For example, discussing ways of verifying claims for tax reduction for crop failure, an early English commissioner advised the district collector of Poona on how information could be collected.

In most villages, too it will be found that there are two or more parties or feuds among the [headmen], [village accountants] or [farmers] from whom an able Cutcherry [office staff] finds little difficulty in acquiring a knowledge of its real resources and the actual condition of individual [farmers].¹²¹

¹²⁰ Tsukasa Mizushima, "The Mirasi System as Social Grammar: State, Local Society and Raiyat in Eighteenth-Nineteenth Century South India," in *The State in India: Past and Present*, Masaaki Kimura and Akio Tanabe, eds. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 140–201, esp. 196.

¹²¹ William Chaplin 1824, cited in Guha, *Agrarian Economy of the Bombay Deccan*, 35; I have replaced Marathi words with English terms for clarity.

Such processes of state interference, exacerbated by subdivision by inheritance and factious disputes, began to reduce the holders of the once-powerful village headman's office to "a beggarly mob of clamorants, who by their internal feuds greatly retard the duties of their office."¹²²

As regards the lower Gangetic delta (or Bengal), we lack good evidence of local political organization. This may be more than the accidental loss of records. This was a frontier region with major migrations underway. In the seventeenth century settled life was disrupted by extensive slave-raiding that penetrated precisely along the arterial waterways that would otherwise have connected a settled agrarian society. If the records discovered by Richard Eaton are any guide, stable agriculture did not return to many areas until the eighteenth century.¹²³ Dispersal, concealment and mobility—all features of what James Scott has called "the art of not being governed" would have been vital to survival in these lawless lands. Drawing on the work of historians of South-east Asia, Scott has proposed that core paddy areas were grandiloquent islands surrounded by great stretches of ungoverned terrain and elusive inhabitants. These would import Indic styles of kingship to their courts but little else.¹²⁴ Such capitals in the southern delta would obviously be major targets of marauders. One would expect them to vanish under the impact of slave-raiding and piracy and the long disruptions of Turkish and Mughal conquest. Settled power would only come with the colonial phase of the military-fiscal state when the possibility of the emergence of new *janapadas* was permanently closed. Further north, in the Brahmaputra and Surma river basins older Buddhist networks spanning the Himalaya shaped patterns of social organization in 'service groups' (*khel*) on the southeast Asian pattern but these in turn were disrupted by the colonial regime.¹²⁵

All this would create the situation in which the powerful local lords termed *zamindār* levied tolls and tribute from large tracts under the Bengal sultans as under the Mughals and indeed even the British. But the domains themselves were usually short-lived. Beneath them, settlement remained scattered. Here the "village" was an arbitrary construct imposed by administrative fiat. In the 1950s, Marriott's comparative study found a "lack of formal economic, political, religious and convivial organization in [Gangetic] Delta

¹²² Gooddine, *Report on Village Communities*, cited in Guha *Agrarian Economy*, 43.

¹²³ Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 194–227.

¹²⁴ James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 110–113.

¹²⁵ Indrani Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends: Monks, Marriages and Memory across Northeast India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), Chapter 1.

neighborhoods."¹²⁶ So the political structures of community relations have left little historical trace in the records: indeed they may not have existed. Perhaps the situation observed by Marriott was older than the social disruption caused by the famine of 1943 and partition of 1947. The thinly populated areas of seasonal wetland and estuarine forest with scattered clusters of homesteads may have had the simple society of what James Scott has termed the *zomia*, structured to avoid governance, whether tribal or monarchic, until the colonial era.

Autonomy to Dependency—The Nāḍu Becomes a Ta'luqa

Even where they had existed, local organizations were by the nineteenth century but one line on the palimpsest of the Gangetic plain. The old caste-dominated *parganas* had largely dissolved under the stress of migration, conquest and commercialization. The villages nonetheless continued to be largely held by one or a few communities—often in shares according to lineage or sect.¹²⁷ Multiple claims existed. The holders of fiscal or military power often converted their brief authority into land rights. So the picture was one of diffused authority, as Marriott noted in the 1950s.

The first British settlement officers in north India found many examples of intrusive official power. I will cite only a few. A village in today's western Uttar Pradesh was originally held by 133 farmers of the Taga caste. But by 1820, a large part of the village was owned by a retired British army officer, Shekh Kullun, who had been the village's tax farmer. "This person is said to be guilty of much exaction, getting the cultivators into his power through bonds executed by them in ignorance or in fear." Elsewhere in western UP,

The two villages ... are stated to be properly puttees [fractions] of one village held by branches of one family, but one Moslems the others Hindoos, Tugehs by caste. They, or some of them are stated to have surrendered the zemindaree to the tehseeldar [tax-collector], a Syud and a man of influence, for protection against the Rajah. He sold to a Hindoo, the dewan [treasurer] of the late Rajah and the present engager [tax-farmer]; and the Tugehs having sued for zemindaree [proprietorship] later filed a deed for ladavee (relinquishment). Mr. Cavendish questions the validity of these transactions, in which only part of the zemindars [proprietors] appear to have been concerned.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Marriott, *Caste Ranking*, 76.

¹²⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, "Structural Change in Indian Rural Society," in *Land Control and Social Structure*, 56–57.

¹²⁸ *Selections from the Revenue Records, North-West Provinces: A.D. 1822–1833* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces Government Press, 1872), 93, 99–100.

Elsewhere, the hostility of a hereditary official at the district level (*qānūngo*) led the owners of the village to seek protection from him by transferring ownership to the *caudhurī*, who gave them a concessional rate of rent.¹²⁹ In the early years of English rule, several powerful Indian officials managed to acquire titles by fraudulent sales for tax arrears that required years of effort by a special commission to unravel.¹³⁰

Further west, in the new kingdom of the Panjab that took shape under Ranjit Singh (d. 1839), powerful fiscal officials also reached down to disrupt long-standing patterns of authority. For example, the 1880 Settlement Report of the Jhang district (now in central Pakistan) observed that the local Syal chiefs, whose rights as a dominant tribe had been unchallenged earlier, saw under the Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh

men who and whose ancestors had as tenants, tilled their lands from time immemorial, and as inferiors, given them their daughters in marriage, elevated to the rank of full proprietors.

As in the provinces of British India beyond the Satlaj, heavy tax demands also led to the rise of powerful 'protectors' (*hāthraḥkāidārs*) who exploited their Court connections to secure a portion of the rent for themselves.¹³¹ This was an example of the widespread process that knitted village communities into central power even as it split them apart into caste-segments.

As central authority penetrated the locality, its residents responded by seeking to penetrate and influence central power. John Malcom described the process:

The villages in Central India, like individuals, seek a patron or protector; and a link once established with any person who possesses power, is a great shield against the oppression of the manager or renter. The Mahratta princes and their principal ministers derive great profit from the fines they impose for errors or crimes, real or pretended of the officers employed in the provinces. This renders the latter very apprehensive of the inhabitants of a village that enjoys the protection of any person at court. This is established in various ways: sometimes from the village having a place of worship frequented by the minister, or any high officer of state, or such persons having free land or gardens within its limits; at other times from an inhabitant being in their

¹²⁹ Ibid., 120–121.

¹³⁰ Government of North-West Provinces, "Report of the Special Commission Appointed under Regulation I of 1821" in *Selections from Revenue Records of the North-West Provinces* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces Government Press, 1873), 1–277.

¹³¹ F.B. Steedman, *Report on the Revised Settlement of the Jhang District of the Punjab 1874–1880* (Lahore: W. Ball, 1882), 68–70.

service ... *The slightest tie is readily improved into a strong bond, in a government where interference in the concerns of others is, to men in office, a source of increase of income and strength.*¹³²

These vertical ties of patronage broke down what remained of territorial, nested hierarchies.

The effective dissolution of the locality as political unit was the inevitable consequence of such extensive engagement with external authority. *Parganas*—village clusters continued to exist in the records, but their political and economic functions withered. Real power moved to bankers and tax farmers or local potentates (who were often one and the same). The units they managed superseded other older territorial divisions. In the north Indian plain, such potentates emerged as *ta'luqdars*—literally, those to whom villages were connected and dependent. These men were sometimes local lords, but many were newcomers of various kinds who soon became irremovable. Where central authority was able to prevent the emergence of such lordships, officials were *tehsildārs*—those who collected taxes. In the more centralized lands of the peninsula, they were given the title of 'administrator' (Marathi *māmledār*) and the unit was a *māmlat*, a unit of governance; under British rule, *taluka* replaced it as the common term for subunit of a district in peninsular India and *tehsil* ('tax-collection') elsewhere. Whatever the name, in most of northern and southern India, the village cluster became an aggregate of territory without (in most cases) a significant political or social life of its own. Thus East India Company—the last and greatest of the military fiscal regimes—administered the coup de grace to the moribund *janapada*, long the historical unit of organized caste hierarchy. Formal caste interaction was, on one hand, pushed down into the village and, on the other, gradually percolated up to the new arenas of provincial politics created by the centralized institutions of colonial governance. We shall engage the former in Chapter 3 and the latter in Chapters 5 and 6.

To conclude: the village cluster grew out of periodical renewal and destruction of tribal domains. Internal differentiation or conquest by monarchs would leave a peasant or aristocratic 'dominant caste' behind it. Centralizing administrative processes would grow out of that local organization. Military fiscalism would ultimately reduce even that, leaving behind the village-level ethnic blocs of twentieth century caste communities.

¹³² John Malcolm, *Memoir I*, 52–53.

Appendix I: The Nāgāñv Protest

Copy written in conformity with the Hindavi [Indic] original—written on the date 12 day of (month) Rabi-us-sani year 1034 [Persian printed in Nagari font; after that text switched to Marathi, my translations of both]

Copy

Saké 1498 [1575 CE] year named Dhātā (month) Caitra bright half fifth day Monday on which day many gathered together and prepared this agreement—all the great men and others and the Desāi and Adikārī district Murtazābād wrote this joint letter stating that to protest the various extra demands for footwear cess, warden's cess, central cess, chancery cess, cess for *deśmukh*, and additional ones to cover defaults and for heirless property, and other impositions and oppressions—everyone will go collectively to the finance minister at the royal court so that such practices be ended.

[Signatories]

Appāji, Desāi and *deśkulkarani* Vāgho Rām Desāi

Alājī *deśmukh* Bāb Thākuru Adikārī

Dharamseṭi Kāsār *seṭiye* [head of the brass-workers]

caudhuri bakāl jamātī [head of the merchant community; this is followed by the names of the heads of different communities—weavers, fishermen, washermen, cowherds, toddy-tappers, tailors, and Dalit (Mahār) village servants]

CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF VILLAGE LIFE

[T]he old Indian social structure was based on ... the autonomous village community; caste and the joint family system.

– Jawaharlal Nehru, 1946¹

This chapter will look at the village first in terms of its political and administrative life and second as an economic unit. It has a dual purpose: a critical discussion of the sociological thought on the subject and an exposition of the results of my own research. I begin with a review of the role of states in shaping villages and also of their ecologically limited success in so doing. As the intra-village division of labor has often been viewed as revealing the role of caste as an integrative institution, I therefore next look at evidence of the geographic spread and economic logic of the *jajmānī* or dyadic service system in the twentieth century, and suggest that rent-seeking, the market, and the intrusive state were important determinants of its changing structure and regional prevalence. That section is followed by one offering a historical analysis of *balutā* or the village servant system in western India from the seventeenth century onward. It shows that the practice was always fraught with conflict and provides evidence of its occasional breakdown and re-establishment. It would follow, then, that the organization may have repeatedly come into being and disintegrated in different regions at various times. The last section of the chapter shows this process at work. The institution was little known in eastern Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh in the early nineteenth century, when it was solidly established in western Maharashtra. But intensive local enquiries reveal that it was beginning to establish itself in the eastern region. After reviewing this case, I conclude that *baluta* was not a primitive institution, but rather one that was created by the state out of competition between specialists in a commercializing but still well-knit rural society.

¹ Cited in Surinder S. Jodhka, "Nation and Village: Images of Rural India in Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar," *Economic and Political Weekly* vol. 37, no. 32 (August 10–16, 2002): 3343.

In 1947, B.R. Ambedkar wrote a memorandum on specific safeguards for scheduled castes that should be incorporated into the future constitution of India. He advanced an idea he had been mulling over for decades. It was a radical proposal for the creation of a specially funded “Settlement Commission” to acquire uncultivated land in order to establish separate villages for the scheduled castes.² That idea did not find its way into the Indian Constitution, but Ambedkar’s proposal shows how central the village had become to the maintenance of caste hierarchy after the village cluster or *janapada* had unraveled under the impact of military fiscalism. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 1, Bernard Cohn identified the “village view of India” as one of the important strands in the understanding of the subcontinent. *Village India* was the title of an important book by McKim Marriott, and even today the village is the elementary unit in official efforts at decentralizing government.

The influential Louis Dumont, on the other hand, rejected the village as a meaningful unit of social organization—according to him, Indians’ orientation to the fundamental value of inequality meant that such solidarity could not exist. For him, the village was merely a convenient territorial unit for the dominant, kingly caste to manage en bloc. Its apparent existence came solely, he said, because villages had a natural economy and everything had to be found in the immediate vicinity.³ This was sometimes true. Communications were often poor, and some villages were in fact corporate only insofar as they were controlled by what British officials termed ‘proprietary brotherhoods’ (*bhāicārā* villages). But the village corporation to which all belonged also had a powerful existence across an immense regions of India, as the gory case from Karanjiya cited on p. 85 shows. If we survey the subcontinent as a whole, it is noticeable that such strongly corporate villages were most common in the arid to semi-arid regions that lie predominantly on the western side of an imaginary line from Delhi to Chennai (formerly Madras). It is not, then, surprising that the two important Indian thinkers to foreground the village as institution—Gandhi and Ambedkar—both came from western India. Their personal experience clearly influenced their thinking on the significance of this institution. The village might be denounced—as most

² Bhimrao Ambedkar, *States and Minorities: What Are Their Rights and How to Secure Them in the Constitution of a Free India*, published by the Scheduled Caste Federation, 1947 no place; accessed December 6, 2012, <http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/10A.%20Statesand%20Minorities%20Preface.htm#remedies>, Clause II, Part 2 (no page numbers); this plan had been proposed in 1942. Eleanor Zelliot “Learning the Use of Political Means: The Mahars of Maharashtra,” 53.

³ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 97, and “A Fundamental Problem in the Sociology of Caste,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* IX (Dec. 1966): 17–32.

famously by Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly, where he asked, “What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?”⁴ The village might also be valued (as by Gandhi) as a repository of authenticity and mutuality, a true foundation for an Indian *swarāj* of autonomous communities.⁵ But historically its life was hardly idyllic as an episode from it will show.

In the mid-seventeenth century the two hereditary headmen of the western Maharashtra village of Karanjiya, accompanied by a Gondnak, a Mahar (Dalit servant), went to the fort of Rohiḍa to pay the village’s taxes. In the fort, Gondnak got into a fight and beat up a state official. (It is possible that the headmen played a more active role in the affray than is reported in the document.) Then they all fled; Gondnak prudently absconded from the village. Soldiers came from the fort and arrested the two headmen and their kin, threatening to behead them all if the culprit was not produced. The soldiers also demanded food and were lavishly entertained with goats’ flesh and marijuana candy. Before passing out, they summoned the village Mahars and told them that if any of the prisoners or their belongings was to go missing, all the Mahars would be beheaded. The villagers then held a hasty council and sought someone to take the blame. None of the Mahars with patrimonial rights in the community (*watandārs*) would agree to confess, saying “Admit guilt to the minister and have our heads and our sons’ heads struck off? This cannot be done by us.” Finally, the Gondnak Mahar who had been involved in the fight at the fort was found and entreated to surrender.

He responded: ‘so I am to lose my head on your account—well, it is acceptable. But swear me an oath on your ancestors as to what *watan* (hereditary patrimony) you will give my son Arajnāk, and I will redeem you.’ The document continues: ‘at that time we pledged our word to Gondnak: “We will give [tax-free and village lands], a share in the customary gifts and a house and exemption from the twelve taka house-tax and from the fee for keeping one buffalo and the right to the village watchman post in its entirety. This will be continued to your brothers, kinsmen, son. Any of our lineage, father, brother, cousin or son who unjustly deviates from this promise is violating the oath sworn to the dark god Mahākāla.”’

The two headmen then went to the same fort and had the agreement duly registered with the officer Dhond Deujī and the officers there. It is interesting that the officials explicitly pardoned the two headmen, and before

⁴ Cited in Jodhka, “Images of Rural India,” 3351.

⁵ Jodhka, “Images,” *ibid.*

registering the deed asked the currently serving village Mahar if the arrangement was acceptable to him.⁶ The entire episode is a vivid illustration of how important belonging to the community (i.e., having a *watan*) was even for the poor and marginal in this western Indian society, and what they would give to secure it. It also illustrates several aspects of the village as a corporate entity. First, it was a living community with a collective life and membership recognized by both those within it and those outside. As we shall see, it functioned in many ways as an economic unit as well. Second, it was an administrative unit—the unit collectively responsible to the state for taxes, offences, and crimes. Nor was the village of Karanjiya exceptional in western India—many such townships from Gujarat through Maharashtra to Karnataka and Tamilnadu maintained a tenacious corporate life well into the twentieth century.⁷ This in turn explains the anxiety of ordinary folk to belong to it and (like Gondnak) pay the highest of prices for admission.⁸ Feuds over village patrimonial office were often accompanied by bloodshed and persisted for generations.⁹

Villages and Kings

The village was even more ubiquitous in thought than on the ground. Its apparent universality as a unit of rural life is in great measure an artifact of colonial and pre-colonial governance, especially of the latter.¹⁰ The idea of

⁶ Rajwade, MIS new edition (Dhule: Rajwade Itihasa Samshodhana Mandala, 2002), vol. 2, 247–249.

⁷ A mass of evidence is to be found in Anant S. Altekar, *Village Communities in Western India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press for the University of Bombay, 1927), Chapter 1.

⁸ S. Settar, “Memorial Stones in South India,” in *Memorial Stones: A Study of their Origin, Significance and Variety*, S. Settar and Gunther D. Sontheimer eds. (Dharwad: Institute for Indian Art History and South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, 1982), 195; 183–197. A number of articles in this rich collection mention memorials to heroes killed in defense of the village or its cattle. Further evidence is in Altekar, *Village Communities*, Chapter 4.

⁹ The Arabic term *watan* (then meaning patrimony; presently meaning country) was often used for these in Maharashtra, as was another loan-word: *mirās* (heritable property). There is an extensive literature on the subject. The best English account (including valuable Marathi documents) is by Ananta R. Kulkarni, in his *Maharashtra in the Age of Shivaji: An Economic History* revised edition (Pune: Prabha Prakashan, 2002), Chapter 2.

¹⁰ So that while the records showed 728,605 villages in the British Empire in India, the compilers of the *Gazetteer* noted that some were actual named units of residence while others were merely areas demarcated by government survey and no more than administrative units. (Nor indeed would every unit of co-residence also be a sociopolitical entity in a functional sense.) *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press for the Government of India, 1909), vol. I, 455.

the village as part of a perfect hierarchy of nested governance had appealed to ruling elites long before the British *Imperial Gazetteer* was compiled. The *Arthaśāstra* also saw it as an administrative unit and recommended that it should contain from one to five hundred households, and have an official in charge who would be paid by minor dues in kind by the villagers. (It is unlikely that many actual villages were so large: few were so big even in the twentieth century.) Where rulers were powerful enough, such village lords could be created *de novo*; elsewhere extant leaders received formal titles. So, for example, the heavy demands of both colonial and indigenous states in early modern Sri Lanka seem to have resulted in the creation of such intermediate territorial heads over physically dispersed hamlets. Elsewhere they already existed and were recognized by centralizing states (and then loaded with obligations to it).

These village heads also bore the brunt of kingly authority. The popular etymology for *muqaddam*—the one who stepped forward—illustrated both the honorific and the horrific aspects of that status. When the military chief Ghazi Malik Tughluq sought to coercively extract a year's revenue in a single payment from his fief in 1306–1307, his agents did so by beating and maltreating these headmen.¹¹ Several centuries later, a village in Maharashtra got an enhanced land measurement canceled by agreeing to pay the sultan's regent, Malik Ambar, a considerable sum; the headman stood forth as a surety. Six months later, when the money was not forthcoming, the headman was told that he would be crushed to death by an elephant if he could not produce the cash.¹² Sometimes when a number of joint owners shared the position of headman, they could find it so burdensome that the proprietary community might in fact choose a permanent head for just this function.¹³ That functionary might then build on the power to become a privileged intermediary, as in the case of the *dewanias* of eastern Bengal.¹⁴

But where village organization was internally generated—and this was, as I have said, widespread in western and peninsular India, the headman was also an important functionary, verging sometimes on manorial lord. His

¹¹ Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 248–249.

¹² Ś.N. Jośi and G.H. Khare, eds., *Śivacaritrasāhitya* III (Pune: BISM, 1930), 75–76. This compelled him to sell a share of his post.

¹³ Ratnalekha Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society* (Delhi: Manohar, 1979), 191.

¹⁴ Harendra N. Chaudhuri, *The Cooch Behar State and Its Land Revenue Settlements* (Cooch Behar: Cooch Behar State Press, 1903), 512–513.

role was regularly affirmed in ceremonial exchanges with the representatives of kingly power and the festivals of the local community. Where, as in the arid peninsula, solidarity was internally generated, material and symbolic exchanges with the state strengthened it further. Symbolic interactions were summed up in the rhyming compound *mān-pān*. These included being the first to receive the honorific betel-leaf roll from the government official who fixed the taxes due, and also a shawl and turban cloth on the same occasion. A range of honors at all the major village festivals—Holi in the spring, Dasehra and Diwali in the autumn—also marked the status of the headman. If and when a share in a headmanship was sold, exact rules of precedence were stipulated in the legal record. Such rituals would obviously celebrate the solidarity of the village as well as honor its functionaries.¹⁵

Collective responsibility, as the story of Gondnak shows, is useful for regimes with few personnel and little information about local society. Beyond serving as a collective unit for punitive purposes, the village was routinely forced deliver taxes and labor services and was subjected to collective reprisal for shortfalls. In the seventeenth century, the agent of a Mughal officer came to the imperial court to claim that a village whose taxes were supposed to support his troops had defaulted on payment. He produced a certificate from the Islamic judge of the area in support of his statement. He was then authorized to plunder the village and take away “captives and cattle” to extract his dues.¹⁶ The village was also often responsible for robberies or other crimes that occurred on its lands, or were tracked into them.¹⁷ In much of the country, this must have served to strengthen already extant collective life; elsewhere coercion may have generated the rudiments of such collective functioning.

It must be obvious, then, that any historical generalization about “the Indian village” must necessarily be inapplicable in large parts of the subcontinent, especially its eastern and western borderlands. Let us look at these extremes first. At the end of the eighteenth century, two knowledgeable English officials wrote of Bengal and Bihar that the *mauza* or village was essentially an administrative entity.

¹⁵ For well-documented English accounts see Kulkarni, *Maharashtra*, and also his Presidential Address to the Indian History Congress Fifty-second session 1992, published as “The Indian Village with Special Reference to the Maratha Country” (Pune: Indian History Congress, 1992).

¹⁶ Khare, PSIH vol. 6, 113; Newsletter of May 10, 1681.

¹⁷ Gune, *Judicial System* Appendix B-IV, doc. 69, 79. In the latter the village of Tisgaon was fined 1000 rupees.

It answers to the word parish more nearly than to any other English term; for several villages or hamlets may stand in the same Mauza; and on the contrary the same town will sometimes include several Mauzas.¹⁸

The only vestige of a village organization that they remarked on was that in Bihar, the post of headman had sometimes become hereditary and conferred a permanent tenure of some land as a perquisite.¹⁹ Authority centered on the big non-peasant landlord, who might hold hundreds of villages or but a fraction of one. In the mid-nineteenth century, the well-informed Civil Service official R.C. Dutt described the pattern of authority in a typical Bengal village as headed by the landlord's agent ("*gomoshta*") and his myrmidons, "who form the head of the village in power, prestige and importance." Caste quarrels were merely an aspect of village faction, "often made a hand-maid to land disputes."²⁰ Further west, in Bihar, villages were often more strongly nucleated on the ground, but authority still ran from the superior landlord, whether big or small. As Anand Yang concluded after a richly documented study of Saran district of Bihar, "the primary networks of control in local society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries derived ultimately" from these landlords.²¹ We may infer that areas (such as the Bengal delta) where such gentry were in economic and political decline would see atomization, with little autonomous governance beyond the neighborhood.

That is indeed what Marriott's survey of the Bengal delta (mainly today's Bangladesh) found in the 1950s. There were no indigenous local officers or other forms of local government beyond informal neighborhood councils. The local organizations that had organized massive protests against the indigo planters in 1859–1860 had sometimes been tacitly supported by landlords, or may have been generated by the movement and subsequently withered away.²² Equally, there was no pattern of regular economic exchanges between different castes; instead, Marriott noted, there was a relatively free economy of cash transactions. At the other ecological extreme, in the arid western Indus plain (south-central Pakistan today) settlements were small,

¹⁸ Anon. [Colebrooke and Lambert], *Remarks on the Husbandry and Internal Commerce of Bengal* second printing (London: Galabin, 1806), 15–16, footnote.

¹⁹ *Husbandry and Internal Commerce of Bengal*, 89–90. They refer to this "mukkedem or mundil" as the first receiver (or collector) of rents.

²⁰ Romesh C. Dutt, *The Peasantry of Bengal* [1874] new edition, with a preface by Narahari Kaviraj (Calcutta: Manisha, 1980), 58–59.

²¹ Anand A. Yang, *The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District, 1793–1920* Indian edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 160–161.

²² For evidence of local organization see Pramodranjan Sengupta, *Nil Bidroha o Bāṃgālī Śamāja* second enlarged edition (Kolkata: Radical Book Club, 1978), 89–93.

often a few houses around an irrigation well. The few specialized functionaries needed were often paid jointly from a common grain heap of the whole settlement or its landlord.²³ (That and other village servant systems will be discussed more completely later in this chapter.) Pastoral nomadism remained an important subsistence strategy in the Indus plain and adjoining mountains, and tribal territorial affiliation was more significant than the location of a homestead site. Administrative fiat could not overcome ecology and terrain.

External pressures—plunder or extortion—could force an extra degree of homogeneity or sustain an original clannish egalitarianism. The late Eric Stokes pointed out in 1975 how even into the nineteenth century, solid co-sharing brotherhoods—the archetype of Metcalfe's famous "village republics"—really existed only where the tremendous pressures from harsh state demands and natural calamities made that degree of solidarity a prerequisite of survival. It was the *peine forte et dure* of man and nature that ensured its continuance.²⁴ Likewise, on the hazardous border of Afghanistan, Thorburn found at least one large Bannu village admittedly established by forcible occupation of land through 150 years. The Tajazai founders readily admitted other hardy adventurers and gave them an equal share during the periodic equalizing land redistributions of the community, a practice known to several Pathan communities. That distribution cemented their collective bond. Thus they "gradually knit together a strong well organized community on the Khatak border." That solidarity in turn sustained their hold on the land. Colonial rule made self-defense less urgent, and so the practice of redistribution was already in decline after three decades in British rule. Lineages were pulling apart in wealth.²⁵

This development would produce the situation prevalent in most of the subcontinent in the nineteenth century, where the farm lands of the village existed as a domain of collective responsibility for taxes and law, but the actual control and agricultural management of individual fields lay in the hands of peasant households, large or small. Because of common grazing on the stubble after harvest, the land would revert to common use for a season.

²³ Marriott, *Caste Ranking and Community Structure*, 66–75.

²⁴ Eric Stokes, "Agrarian Society and Pax Britannica in Northern India in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies* 9, no. 4 (1975): 505–528; see also B.H. Baden-Powell, *The Origin and Growth of Village Communities in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1908), 91–97, for an analysis on these lines. Also the quote from Modave on p. 62.

²⁵ *Report on the Regular Land Revenue Settlement of the Bannu District of the Derajat Division effected by Mr S.S. Thorburn* (Lahore: Central Jail Press, 1879), 131–132.

The state often sought to make up shortfalls in taxes by enforcing collective responsibility, and in this sense a major part of the output of the village went willy-nilly into a common pool. At the same time, from the time of the Mughals onward, the ever-suspicious eye of officialdom sought to gather individualized information, usually with the ostensible motive of ensuring an equitable sharing of burdens within the community.²⁶ The common village threshing floor and grain heap sometimes seen (as by the anthropologist W.C. Neale²⁷) as the epitome of mutuality and harmony was, in fact, created by the need to satisfy the landlord or the king's officer, who insisted on supervising the harvesting and threshing of the grain in a central location to ensure that his claims were met before anything went to feed the peasants. Quite often even the commencement of harvesting had to wait the landlord's or the government officer's permission.²⁸ In areas where commercial crops were important to the tax system, such controls were enforced by the early East India Company government, too, as for example, in south Gujarat.²⁹ In many cases, a special cess was levied to pay the watchmen employed to supervise the process.³⁰ Threats and violence were a continual part of the process, and at least one major peasant uprising in Mughal India (the Satnami revolt) was sparked when one such watchman struck a peasant with his cudgel.³¹ This ubiquitous cudgel—the ancient *daṇḍa*—thus enforced the “orientation to the whole” that Dumont attributed to fundamental religious values.³²

The Village as Production Unit in Theory and Reality

We now move to consider the village as an economic rather than an administrative unit. Until the twentieth century, it would be safe to say that rural life in every part of South Asia was largely sustained by the land and its produce. Cultivation was (with few exceptions) carried out in individual farm

²⁶ Habib, *Agrarian System*, 1999 ed. 271–273.

²⁷ Walter C. Neale, “Reciprocity and Redistribution in the Indian Village: Sequel to Some Notable Discussions,” in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, Karl Polanyi, et al. eds. (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), 218–236.

²⁸ See Moens and Boulderson in note 43 below.

²⁹ Sumit Guha, “Commodity and Credit in Upland Maharashtra c. 1800–1950,” *Economic and Political Weekly Review of Agriculture*, 26 December 1987, A-126 to A-140.

³⁰ In Rajasthan known as “ghugri shahna”—see Satya Prakash Gupta, *Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan c. 1650–1750* (Delhi: Manohar, 1986), 157.

³¹ Habib, *Agrarian System*, 1999 ed., 396.

³² Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 245.

units normally worked by a family unit with varying amounts of dependent and casual labor. Yet a range of goods and services were consumed by most rural households and provided by a varying number of specialists. Some of these would be paid in cash or its common equivalent, grain. But over large regions, a varying number of specialists were often formally attached to the village. Early colonial officials usually termed them village servants or village menials. Due to historical accident, the only colonial administrations involved in the close scrutiny of individual villages were the old Madras and Bombay presidencies and, a few decades later, the North-West Provinces.

The earliest formulation of the village as an organized, self-sufficient “little republic” is found in Mark Wilks’s *Historical Sketches of the South of India* (1817), and is again documented in Ellis’s *Replies* of 1819. For western India, Thomas Coats also published a careful account of the village servants in 1819, and a few years later W.H. Sykes wrote a more general account based on four years of research as the official statistical reporter on the Deccan, that part of the western peninsular area under British rule.³³ In the same period land measurement and assessment processes in northern India produced a number of reports that again identified the institution of collectively maintained village servants in the western Gangetic plain. A few decades later, W.C. Benett was charged with settling taxes in the newly annexed district of Gonda in north India (formerly the protected state of Oudh). Working in the evolutionist mode of the late nineteenth century of the time, he postulated an anterior, nonmonetary tribal collective stage of village life, and proceeded to build a model of the entire village sustained from the “grain heap” generated by its collective harvest. Traditional India as he saw it was an agglomeration of such economically autonomous villages, paying only a grain-tribute to the raja.³⁴ B.H. Baden-Powell, in his massive compendium of land systems, found an explanation of the existence of the traditional village in terms of a ‘Dravidian’ institution adopted by the ‘Aryans’—again therefore, a result of primordial traits. In the 1920s, A.S. Altekar wrote the first historically grounded study of the village as community. He argued for both the antiquity and the functional nature of the system and showed that

³³ F.W. Ellis, *Replies to Seventeen Questions Proposed by the Government of Ft. St. George Relative to Mirasi Right* (Madras: Government Gazette Office, 1818); W.H. Sykes, “Land Tenures of the Deccan,” [1830] printed in British Parliamentary Papers (Commons) vol. 52 1866; Thomas Coats, “Account of the Present State of the Township of Lony,” in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* vol. III, 1823.

³⁴ W.C. Benett, *The Final Settlement Report of the Gonda District* (Allahabad: North-western Provinces and Oudh Government Press, 1878), 47–48.

references to it were found in the *Arthaśāstra*. He also traced its evolution into his own times.³⁵ Almost simultaneously, a missionary couple, William and Charlotte Wiser, took up residence in a north Indian village and began observing its socio-economic system. Their observations were worked into a monograph that added the term *jajmānī* to the western anthropological vocabulary on Indian society.³⁶ On the other hand, the common Indic term for the village system—*balutā* in western India—was never borrowed and is still relatively unknown even among social scientists in India today. This name described a system in which a village would have hereditary functionaries with fixed entitlements that could be levied from all the households in a given village community in return for equally specific payments in kind (sometimes supplemented with cash) at the harvest and on festive occasions. These functionaries ranged from watchmen and leather workers to powerful officers like the headman and accountant. Some were dominant, others subordinate, but all received dues in kind and other perquisites. *Jajmānī*, on the other hand, has entered sociological literature to describe the relationship between a patron household and individual servant household(s) that supplied it (and other similar patrons) with goods or services in return for payments at harvest and on other occasions.

Some scholars like Peter Mayer have seen these systems as distinct from each other; others like Dumont have denied the distinct character of the *balutā* system and seen it as a special case of *jajmānī* where the village lords simply allotted land from a communal fund created by them instead of resorting to dyadic exchanges with the specialist.³⁷ Dumont cites only one primary source for this, and that one nowhere supports his claim. This is Gooddine's report of 1852, which was (as its subtitle itself announced) mainly concerned with a subclass of payments known as *parbhāra haks* and its collection by village headmen and accountants, not by craftsmen or providers of personal service.³⁸ These officers were often little potentates:

³⁵ Baden Powell is cited in Altekar, *Village Communities*, 91. At this time, 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' were interpreted as successive races that had settled in India. Altekar's evidence from the first millennium CE is on 92 ff., including the quote from the *Arthaśāstra* mentioning that the grain left on the threshing-floor belonged to the *grāmabhṛtaka* or village servant.

³⁶ Charlotte V. Wiser and William H. Wiser, *Behind Mud Walls* first published 1930; I have used the updated edition—*Behind Mud Walls: Seventy-Five Years in a North Indian Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

³⁷ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 98–99.

³⁸ R.N. Gooddine, *Report on the Village Communities of the Deccan: with Especial Reference to the Claims of the Village Officers in the Ahmednuggur Collectorate to "Purbhara huks"* (Bombay: Selections from the Records of the Government of Bombay No. 4, 1852). Gooddine was also

their dues were tributes to a superior, not bounties to a dependent. They cannot be assimilated to *jajmānī* by anyone with the least knowledge of either system. For whatever reason, *balutā*—an institution well known to colonial administrators and Indian historians³⁹ was never recognized by Western anthropologists who, if they considered the rural division of labor at all, focused on the rationale of *jajmānī*. It is a classic example of the Orientalist producing the Orient.

A year after the second edition of the Wisers' book had appeared in 1958, their formulation of *jajmānī* as a mutualist organization was penetratingly criticized by Thomas Beidelman, who argued that the system was maintained only by the exercise of the socio-economic power that arose from landholding.⁴⁰ The critique was largely ignored. Walter C. Neale went on to declare in 1962 that the

economy of India was built upon the joint family, which was generally able to satisfy its own needs. When the aid of a craftsman or a special service such as that of a watchman was required, the village provided it.⁴¹

So perfect was the ideological integration that Neale imagined that there

was no bargaining, and no payment for specific services rendered. There was no accounting ... and the whole produce was easily and successfully divided among the villagers.⁴²

The empirical foundation of this description is again entirely inadequate to the theoretical load placed on it. Share rents were often a source of great oppression.⁴³ Neale was drawing from W.C. Bennett's above-mentioned imag-

anxious to support the Government's agenda of eliminating such payments and reducing these functionaries to government employees. Dumont clearly failed to grasp the context of Gooddine's work.

³⁹ Among officials, see Mark Wilks and W.H. Sykes; among historians A.S. Altekar was followed by A.R. Kulkarni, H.K. Fukazawa and many others. Full references are in the bibliography.

⁴⁰ Thomas O. Beidelman, *A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System* (Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin 1959), 5–6. See also C.J. Fuller, "Misconceiving the Grain-heap: A Critique of the Concept of the Indian Jajmani System," in *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, J. Parry and M. Bloch, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54–55.

⁴¹ Walter C. Neale, *Economic Change in Rural India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 5.

⁴² Walter C. Neale, in *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: Economies in History and Theory*, Karl Polanyi, C.M. Arensberg and H.W. Pearson, eds. (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1957), 226. This formulation is contradicted by much of the rich ethnographic detail in the Wisers' own account of everyday life in Karimpur. See William H. Wiser and Charlotte Wiser, *Behind Mud Walls*, 40–43.

⁴³ In 1874, S.M. Moens, the Settlement officer of Bareilly district (U.P.), wrote that the

inactive reconstruction of a legendary past in his Gonda district settlement report of 1878. But if we read Benett's report, we see that it was not even a description of the situation at the time when it was written. The report recognized that economic forces such as the relative scarcity of land determined shares—so the “slave-ploughman” received one-seventh of the gross produce in densely populated areas, but one-fifth where labor was less abundant. Similarly, he reported that these slaves sometimes fled and found work elsewhere, saving money to redeem their kin from debt-bondage.⁴⁴ Bondage, escape, ransom: all imply coercion, and that is hardly compatible with the harmonies imagined by Neale. Dumont, on the other hand, recognized the role of hierarchy and inequality in the *jajmānī* of Wiser's description; but that (he thought) was because the religious values of Indian civilization fundamentally oriented it to holistic inequality. He preferred to deny village solidarity as such, since India could never escape from “hierarchy and dominance.” Hence there was no “village community”; only an organization of the dominant caste, the kingly ones.⁴⁵ This was indeed applicable in many parts of the subcontinent where landowners also jointly owned the village site and common lands, and so possessed the power to not only deny employment but also to force recalcitrant subordinates from their homes. But this cannot explain the *balutā* system.

The proprietary model of *jajmānī* connects better with Klass's theory of the social role of caste as a crucial element of the economy. In his model, those who controlled the land were at the apex of a redistributive system

“tenant cannot cut crop when it is ready; he must wait until the landlord is able and ready to supervise the operation through his *shahnas* or watchers ...” This gave the landowner immense power to harass his tenants so that Moens saw them on occasion reduced to virtual serfdom. His predecessor Boulderson in 1830 had commented that this oversight created an “incessant, wearing, harassing interference between landlord and tenant, making a constant sore and irritation where a good feeling is particularly requisite. ... If a landlord wishes to ruin a tenant he has only to hold off from dividing the crop till rain comes down and rots it, or the same effect may follow from his not being able to attend or depute an agent.” *Bareilly Settlement Report*, 119–120.

⁴⁴ W.C. Benett, *The Final Settlement Report of the Gonda District*, 47; that actual collections were and had been for a long time in cash is admitted on 56–58.

⁴⁵ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 101–102, 152–153, 161–163. For a thoughtful analysis of the opposition of egalitarianism and hierarchy as civilizational principles, see Andre Beteille's Reith Lectures for 1979, “Homo Hierarchicus, Homo Equalis” republished in *Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays* [1983] 2003 reprint, 35–56. I have published my critique of Neale and Dumont's understandings of the village servant system in “Civilisations, Markets and Services: Village Servants in India from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 41, no. 1 (2004): 73–94 to which the reader is referred for further discussion.

of which each individual was a representative of his caste specialization. Enforcement, in Klass's view, depended on the rule of endogamy; exclusion from the marriage circle cut off the offending household from social reproduction.⁴⁶ But the origin of the closed marriage circle as a universal rule is, however, left obscure. Equally absent is any sense of historical change. This problem with many anthropological approaches was noted by C.J. Fuller some years ago. On the basis of a review of a few twentieth-century village studies and some secondary historical literature, he nonetheless correctly concluded that the concept of *jajmānī* as a system is "predicated upon a combination of historical inaccuracy and the ahistorical premise of unchanging 'traditional' India." He then suggested that his demolition of the concept might open the way to "a more productive analysis of forms of exchange in Indian society."⁴⁷ He was seconded by van der Veer, who a few years later characterized the idea of *jajmānī* as an encompassing, static system as an anthropological myth.⁴⁸ The historical reassessment of this will form a major part of the agenda of this chapter.

The "village servant system" or *balutā* system (to use its Marathi name) and the related but distinct *jajmānī* system have attained a certain importance in social theory because they appear to exemplify the possibility of organizing the division of labor in complex societies on principles radically different from the those formulated by mainstream (Western) economics since the eighteenth century. It is for this reason significant in a debate in economic anthropology dubbed "substantive/ formalist," inaugurated by Karl Polanyi in the late 1950s.⁴⁹ That debate turned on the extent to which internalized cultural norms or values could control economic activity. Academic thought has moved beyond the false dichotomy presented in the 1950s.⁵⁰ So this chapter will avoid the debate and, instead, seek to understand South Asia's changing set of institutional practices and socio-economic relations in historical context.

⁴⁶ Klass, *Caste*, 131–133.

⁴⁷ J.C. Fuller, "Misconceiving the Grain Heap: A Critique of the Concept of the Indian Jajmani System," 57.

⁴⁸ Van der Veer, "The Foreign Hand", 31.

⁴⁹ Karl Polanyi, "The Economy as Instituted Process" [1957] reprinted in Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg, eds., *The Sociology of Economic Life* 2nd. edition (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 31–50.

⁵⁰ The current state of knowledge is lucidly presented by the readings and discussion in Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg eds., *Sociology of Economic Life*, 1–135, to which the reader is referred.

The issue is also significant as it forms (in the work of Dumont) a central support of the idea that South Asian (or Hindu) civilization is founded on principles totally different from those of the egalitarian West and based on an interdependence of rich and poor that is “in the end to the advantage of the latter.”⁵¹ Contrast this to the reality of a north Indian village around 1950, as described in the memoir of a Dalit youth, Omprakash Valmiki, who grew up in it. He narrates an incident deeply revealing of the actual texture of *jajmānī* relations: his mother worked for eight or ten Taga (upper-caste landowner) households. One of these was celebrating a daughter’s wedding, and his mother waited with him and his younger sister to clear up and take away the basket in which the guests threw their used leaf-plates and uneaten food. These scraps were her remuneration for the extra work. When all the guests had left, she asked for a leaf-cup of unspoiled food for her children.

Sukhdev Singh pointed to the basket full of soiled leaf-plates, and said “She is taking a full basket of food-refuse ... and on top of that asks food for her children. Mind your status, O [caste-name]! Pick up the basket and get out!” ... That day the Goddess descended into my mother. I had never seen her thus before. She scattered the contents of the basket, and said to Sukhdev Singh “Gather this and store it in your house. Feed it to your guests for breakfast.” She took our hands and left, swift as an arrow. Sukhdev Singh had stepped forward to strike her but she faced him down like a tigress. From that day she never went to their door again and the custom of collecting soiled scraps ended in our household.⁵²

Economic and political weakness and social inferiority continued seamlessly into labor market settings:

Most Tagas stinted on wages for their employees. The reapers were desperate. After some protests, they took whatever was given and came home. Upon getting home, they grumbled or kept cursing the Tagas. But protest was strangled by hunger. Each year, there were meetings in the [Dalit] quarter over harvest-wages. Participants would swear not to accept less than one bundle out of sixteen harvested. But once the work was done, their resolve evaporated: one bundle out of twenty-one was the best that could be got.⁵³

Such cases were legion. When Ambedkar was preparing his memorandum for the Constituent Assembly for instance, a coercive social boycott was imposed on the Dalits of Kheri Jessore in Rohtak district (then east Panjab,

⁵¹ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, 103.

⁵² Omprakash Valmiki, *Jūṭhan* (Delhi: Rādhākṛṣṇa Prakāśan, 2003), 21.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

now Haryana) when they refused to accept a wage reduction.⁵⁴ In Valmiki's description of his mother's encounter we see how social weakness allowed the community to be coerced in both the ritual and economic domains. Poverty and economic dependence prevented self-assertion and efforts at upward mobility.⁵⁵ In the rural setting, the Dalit community was unprivileged in both spheres but (as we shall see) new opportunities could also arise, and low status could in fact give preferential access.

Migrants, Markets, and Institutions

William Wiser believed that what he described in Karimpur was a relic of an ancient social organization and therefore quite recent. In 1958, he wrote: "The Hindu Jajmani System as it stands today in Karimpur is a disintegrated form of the ancient Village Commune."⁵⁶ Clearly, Wiser believed that something approximating to the western Indian *balutā* system had existed before his arrival; this had then disintegrated to leave behind the service relationships between particular landowning households and their dependents. In this respect, he would have agreed with Peter Mayer, whose detailed analysis of the evidence on *jajmānī* in English-language sources was published in 1993. Mayer traced the earliest English mention to Yule and Burnell's *Hobson-Jobson* of 1855, and noted that a complete description of a dyadic relationship akin to that depicted by Wiser was found in E.A.H. Blunt's census report of 1911 for the United Provinces. Mayer also presented a novel view of *jajmānī*; he saw it as the reaction by various service groups to new opportunities and pressures arising out of British rule and associated changes in the urban and rural economies. Notably, he saw it as resulting from the accelerated breakup of collective village tenures in which the landholding body collectively paid the land tax and regulated the services of the various village servants. He is also at pains to confine it to northern India, and to distinguish it and its precursors from the village servant systems of the Indian peninsula. He concludes that *jajmānī* "was probably in widespread

⁵⁴ Ambedkar, *Minorities*, Explanations Appendix I.

⁵⁵ Many searing pages in Valmiki recount his harrowing experiences when his father sought to get him educated in the government school nearby.

⁵⁶ W.H. Wiser, *The Hindu Jajmani System*, [1936], third edition (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1969), 84–85. It is very striking that Wiser's extensive citation of British official sources from all over India in support of his idea of the antecedent existence of a "village commune" has been completely ignored in later academic discussion.

existence in Uttar Pradesh for less than thirty years when Blunt first described it in 1911."⁵⁷

Mayer's emphasis on the changing, regionally diverse, and entrepreneurial nature of the inter-household relations is well taken though I disagree with his separation of northern and southern systems. The dynamic view is supported by a valuable and little-used ethnographic source, the *Report of the Committee on Customary Rights to Scavenging* published by the Government of India in 1966. This committee corresponded with a number of state governments and also made local inquiries in many parts of India before submitting its report. The "customary right" described had all the features of what is referred to as *jajmānī*. It could be transferred like any other property.

One particular scavenger acquires a right to clean such latrines, as against another scavenger. In small towns he is generally paid in kind (a daily *roti* [cake of bread]) and some perquisites like food or clothes, etc., on some special occasion like births, marriages, deaths, etc., varying with the status of the householder. Often in bigger towns he is also paid partially in cash ... and in cities he is generally paid only in cash. It is said that in times of need they sell or mortgage their rights to other scavengers in the same manner as one does with one's property.

The committee found that what anthropological literature described as *jajmānī* did not extend even to the eastern Gangetic plain. It was found in the west and center of Uttar Pradesh, in Rajasthan, in Madhya Pradesh (excluding the east or present-day Chhattisgarh state), mainly in the western parts of Gujarat, in Punjab, and in (predominantly Muslim) Jammu and Kashmir. It was also found (as a recent importation) in the Telangana districts of Andhra Pradesh and parts of Marathwada (east-central Maharashtra).⁵⁸

The committee also sought to discover the origins of the system. It remarked on the fact that indoor latrines were few in the countryside and had usually belonged to people of high status who would not relieve themselves *al fresco*. These were cleaned by the village sweepers, who like other rural servants

had a claim in each harvest. The quantity of foodgrains given to them was fixed according to the status of the *Jajmān*. This type of *Jajmānī* system still prevails in many areas. Apart from foodgrains and in some cases land, these

⁵⁷ Peter Mayer, "Inventing Village Tradition: The Late 19th Century Origins of the North Indian 'Jajmani' System," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, 2 (1993): 378–386.

⁵⁸ Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of India, *Report of the Committee on Customary Rights to Scavenging* (Faridabad: Government of India Press, 1966), 2–3.

artisans also got new or old clothes annually and perquisites ... on ceremonial occasions like births and marriages and during festivals.

The committee plausibly suggested that wealthy rural households gradually moved to the towns accompanied by their servants; the latter then sought to monopolize their patrons by the custom described above. Long-distance migration from areas where the practice was prevalent could also transfer the usage: thus numbers of Balmikis from western Uttar Pradesh and present-day Haryana migrated to the old Hyderabad state and divided the growing urban areas into beats termed *brit* held under customary law. Older local groups may have taken the opportunity to withdraw or were bought out. In central Maharashtra, “there is no local scavenging caste except a few Muslim Sheikhs. Mahars do only [street] sweeping work. Scavengers from North India purchased *Brits* from local scavengers (generally Muslim Sheikhs).” It is evident that economic calculation was very much present in these transactions; we may note also that Muslim Sheikhs were classified as a scavenging caste regardless of their abandonment of Hinduism. This was exactly the situation of the Christians of Karimpur during the Wisers’ stay there.⁵⁹ A similar situation has persisted in parts of rural Pakistan to the present.⁶⁰

Another form of upward mobility was exemplified by Dalit entrepreneurs who acquired monopolies in newly urbanizing areas. “These intermediaries or contractors by their shrewdness or cleverness enter into negotiations with new colonisers [developers] and set up new Jagirs [estates].” This was also a channel for the investment of capital: immigrant purchasers of scavenging rights in central Maharashtra were often financed by caste fellows in Hyderabad at high rates of interest.⁶¹ In the town of Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, there were

only 18 [sweepers] having *Brit-Jajmani* Subsequently it was revealed that all of them had employed servants, usually municipal sweepers not having

⁵⁹ Wiser and Wiser, *Behind Mud Walls*, 47–52.

⁶⁰ The blasphemy case ending in a death sentence against Asia Bibi, a Christian “began in the fields of Ittan Wali, a village 60 miles west of Lahore, when agricultural workers picking berries with her protested that she had been asked by a landlord to fetch water for them to drink. The other workers declined to touch the water bowl because Ms. Bibi had carried the container, according to accounts by her husband, Ashiq Masih, and others.”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/world/asia/23pstan.html?scp=1&sq=Asia%20Bibi%20Pakistan&st=cse>.

⁶¹ *Rights to Scavenging*, 30. ‘Jagir’ was originally a Mughal administrative term for the land allotted in official salary; as these became quasi-permanent it came to mean a landlord estate. Here the term was used for the exclusive, transferrable right to clean the latrines of a specified set of houses.

their own *Brits* for cleaning private latrines. The latter are only allowed to take *rotis* [bread] from households served by them. It was alleged that if the cash income from the families served by a tenant scavenger was, say, Rs. 25 p.m., the *ilagedar* [beat-owner] would give only Rs. 2 p.m. to the servant and pocket the rest of the money.⁶²

Despite so much evidence for adaptation to economic opportunity, the committee persisted in seeing disputes between householders and scavengers as a recent departure from traditional mutualism and ancient harmony. This was unsupported by any evidence: and in fact, as we shall see below, the earliest records of this system are records of disputes and conflicts. Much of the evidence here thus supports Peter Mayer's attempt to portray *jajmānī* as an ever-changing changing relationship of service and payment. But I would argue that it was not as novel as he portrays it. He also confines his analysis to north India, deprecating the attempts made by Beidelman and others, including Wiser, to assimilate the north Indian dyadic relationships with the village servant systems found in much of southern and western India. But there is significant historical evidence to support Wiser and Beidelman's case.⁶³

In Panjab under Sikh rule, for instance "the blacksmith, carpenter, potter, washerman, barber, water-carrier, tailor, cotton-stuffer, cobbler and priest" received an allowance of grain per plough for their professional assistance.⁶⁴ The north Indian village inquiries conducted for tax assessment purposes in the early nineteenth century often noted the presence of village servants with specified allowances. For example, in Nagla Shekhoo of Merath district, the accountant had a fixed share of the revenue in cash or kind, as did the lower-caste servants.⁶⁵ Other villages had more elaborate systems—for example, in Kheree BooZoory, Sikandra pargana, the Dalit village servant was hereditary and had 6 2/3 bighas of rent-free land plus a grain allowance per plough; the leather-worker, one measure of grain per plough; the barber, washerman, and potter had both land and grain allowances per plough; the carpenter and smith, each ten measures per plough. The Dalit also worked as a sweeper and got a quarter rupee at each birth and half a rupee at each marriage. In other cases, the Board of Revenue's summary merely described all these as "village officers," paid

⁶² *Rights to Scavenging*, 8–12, 20.

⁶³ See the extensive citations in Wiser, *Jajmani System*, 77–89.

⁶⁴ Indu Banga, *Agrarian System*, 187.

⁶⁵ *Selections from the Revenue Records of the North-Western Provinces: A.D. 1822–1833* (Allahabad: North-Western Provinces Government Press, 1872), 108, 115–116.

partly in land and partly in cash.⁶⁶ Their widespread presence was noted by the Board, which proposed that a standard heading be created in all village survey reports for “village servants, persons holding land, or receiving any perquisites on account of service rendered.”⁶⁷

The important work of the late H.K. Fukazawa traced a reference to the village servant system in Max Weber, who had termed it “demiurgic.” Weber believed that Indian villages had allotted certain dues to “craftsmen, temple priests, barbers, laundrymen, and all kinds of laborers belonging to the village—the village ‘establishment.’ They hold on a ‘demiurgic’ basis; that is, they are not paid for their work in detail but stand in the service of the community in return for a share in the land or in the harvest.”⁶⁸ This is clearly the practice reported from north India in the early nineteenth century.

*The Village Servant System from the
Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*

Fukazawa was one of the earliest scholars to publish in English on the issue of *balutā* and *jajmānī* in the pre-colonial period and to use contemporary sources rather than the conveniently accessible colonial reconstructions of the period.⁶⁹ He cogently warned that what is taken as traditional or extant from time immemorial “may actually have developed in the very recent past.”⁷⁰ As Fukazawa’s article is readily available, it is unnecessary for me to do more than list his main conclusions. First, he showed that the functionaries were maintained by the village as a territorial whole—thus conforming to the “village servant” rather than the *jajmānī* type of relation. Even

⁶⁶ *Selections N-WP* (1872), 121; eighteen villages of Hathras tehsil.

⁶⁷ *Selections N-WP* (1872), 198; for Central India see Adrian C. Mayer, *Caste and Kinship in Central India: A Village and its Region* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 70–71.

⁶⁸ Max Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. Frank H. Wright (Glencoe IL: The Free Press, 1950), 22. I traced this reference through H.K. Fukazawa, “Rural Servants in the Maharashtra Village: Demiurgic or Jajmani System?”, in *The Medieval Deccan: Peasants, Social Systems and States, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 199–244.

⁶⁹ A much more complete account is A.R. Kulkarni, “The Maratha Baluta System,” in *Maharashtra: Society and Culture* (New Delhi: Books and Books, 2000), 1–62. Important new work by other Japanese scholars became available in English in 1997 in Hiroyuki Kotani, ed., *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed* (Delhi: Manohar, 1997). Very significant historical data supporting my argument is found in Masanori Sato, “South-eastern Rajasthan A.D. 1650–1800,” 30–53; H. Kotani, “Ati-shudra Castes in the Medieval Deccan,” 55–75; and “Conflict and Controversy over the Mahar Watan,” 105–131, in *ibid*.

⁷⁰ Fukazawa, “Rural Servants,” 208–209.

when the right was partitioned like other property, *balutā*-servants were not transformed from being “the servants of the village” to becoming “the servants of certain specific families.”⁷¹ *Jajmānī* was known alongside *balutā*: Brahmans functioning as priests sometimes had exclusive claims to serve specific castes or lineages, but not the village as a whole.⁷² The role of the state in shaping the system was evident in the presence of the *maulānā*—a functionary probably added in western Maharashtra under the sultanates of Ahmadnagar and Bijapur (c. 1500–1650). Writing in 1819, Thomas Coats described this functionary as existing in many villages. “The Mahomedan Sacrificer kills the sheep at sacrifices and festivals; his wages are a portion of grain and straw [at harvest].”⁷³ H.H. Mann found the institution still in place a century later.⁷⁴

So far, the village servant system has been considered in intravillage terms. But the village community itself stood in the service of a demanding, peremptory, and violent set of overlords. Arbitrary demands for money, labor service, and produce were an inescapable feature of rural and urban life for most people into the twentieth century.⁷⁵ Forced labor for the needs of officials and other gentry was a heavy and erratic burden, and much of the energy of “village servants” was in fact expended in rendering this government service, so as to prevent random villagers being conscripted for it.⁷⁶ This was evident when Sykes surveyed western Maharashtra in 1825–1829: “occasionally the answer to my inquiries respecting the duties of the Mahrs

⁷¹ Fukazawa, “Rural Servants,” *passim* and 238–239.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 232–233.

⁷³ Thomas Coats, “Account of the Present State of the Township of Lony,” *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* Vol. 3 (1823): 191.

⁷⁴ H.H. Mann, *Land and Labour in a Deccan Village I: Pimpla Soudagar*, 123. He adds that the real reason the presence of a Muslim butcher was “that in the high Maratha families there has crept in, we know not how, a feeling that flesh before being eaten must have been blessed by the *munzawar* (*sic*) or priest of the local Mohamedan saint or *peer*,” 123, footnote.

⁷⁵ Requisitions are not unknown even now, though ‘newsworthy’ nowadays. When the Chief Minister of Bihar’s daughter was married, luxury cars were forcibly removed from dealerships in Patna for the guests to ride. “The Durability of Laloo Prasad Yadav,” accessed on December 1, 2012, <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2004/05/08/stories/2004050800031000.htm>.

⁷⁶ The consequences of refusal in the early 1950s are vividly described by Omprakash Valmiki. Some Dalits had been refusing unpaid service to their *jajmāns*: the latter decided to teach them a lesson. They used the visit of a government employee as a pretext. When the Dalits refused his summons to unpaid labour, two policemen came and rounded up ten of them at random. They were made to squat with their hands holding their ears, and beaten with a bamboo cudgel. “The sepoy beating them grew exhausted with the effort. The beaten man cried out at each blow.” Valmiki, *Jūthan*, 50–51.

was, that they were to do everything they were ordered, whether by the Pateel, the village corporation or by the government.”⁷⁷ So for instance, when the great lord, Nimbalkar of Karmalleh

had one of his regiments of horse stationed near Wangi, the Mahrs worked gratuitously for six months in the year, in the stables; on the removal of the cavalry Nimbalkar levied a tax on the Mahrs, in place of six months stable work, but did not remit any of their ordinary duties.

In another township, the Mahrs had earlier had the “specific duties of gratuitously supplying all government officers who came into the district, and partly, also, the hill forts, with dry wood and grass.”⁷⁸

These demands continued under British rule. Thus S.J. Thackeray, principal collector, wrote from Dharwad in 1824 that since porters were scarce and the population of the lower castes was

insufficient to supply the demand, the Amildar’s peons often press into service men who have never carried loads in their lives until the officers of our Government impressed them. When two or three hundred coolies are required, and only a day’s notice is given for procuring them, the peons often seize upon inhabitants (with the exception of Brahmins and soucars [bankers]), indiscriminately drive them in a herd to the place of rendezvous and pen them like cattle until the arrival of the baggage.

Thackeray sought to revive what he believed was old usage and issued a proclamation requiring that “the village officer is on no account to press the ryuts [peasants] for coolies but is to procure them without violence from the lower classes of [various caste-names] and other similar castes accustomed to carry burdens. Should there be not sufficient number of such persons, the deficiency shall be supplied from the neighbouring villages.”⁷⁹ The march of a British military detachment in any part of India could terrorize a neighborhood. So in 1773, Governor General Warren Hastings proposed increasing the land revenue by a cess so as to create an establishment of bullocks and porters to be maintained by every tax-farmer in Bengal. He asked rhetorically if they would not choose to pay that rather than be “frightened, plundered and insulted and have their lands deserted

⁷⁷ W.H. Sykes, “Special Report on the Statistics of the Dukhun,” in *Reports of the Seventh Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* 1837, 291.

⁷⁸ W.H. Sykes, “On the Land Tenures of the Dekhan,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 2 (1835): 227.

⁷⁹ Printed in R.D. Choksey, ed., *Period of Transition (1818–1826)* (Poona: The Author, 1945), 202, 204.

on every rumour of a march by a party of sepoys?"⁸⁰ Where (unlike Bengal) village organization was strong and population scanty, permanent village servants would supply the labor. This pattern was found all over the sub-continent. Thomas Marshall worked for many years in Gujarat and had an intimate knowledge of local life. Writing in 1820, he saw labor service as the main duty of the village Dalits. "The specific duty of the [Dalit] is to carry burdens; and for this purpose from four to ten are entertained at each village and have each four or five koombas of rent-free land."

It is evident that the colonial administration was thus reinforcing and reviving a system of village responsibility that would in turn, reinforce the village servant system. If the dominant caste villagers did not maintain an adequate number of village servants for such occasions, they risked being violently conscripted to replace them. As late as the 1870s, Denzil Ibbetson described how at the beginning of each agricultural year the landless Dalit households in each village of Karnal district were allotted to different kin-household clusters (*lāna*). Then agreements were made stipulating whether the servant household was to be constantly available for field labor, available only on special occasions, or available solely for government forced labor (*sarkāri begār*). The share of the crop paid them varied correspondingly. "The [Dalits] are the coolies of the tract. They cut grass, carry wood, put up tents, carry bundles, act as watchmen and the like for officials; and this work is shared by all the [Dalits] of the village."⁸¹ In the 1928 the Government of Bombay Province set up a Committee to enquire into the conditions of the "Depressed Classes" and tribals. B.R. Ambedkar was a member and often cited its report.⁸² The Committee was forced to note that large amounts of labor were demanded from the Mahars and the corresponding Gujarati class of Vethias to carry official baggage from village to village. But being a government committee it could not do more than comment that the system was rife with waste and injustice; however, it did not suggest paying the village servants because the ensuing cost to the government would be "very great." The committee also observed that forced labor was still illegally exacted by

⁸⁰ Which was obviously what was currently happening. Hastings to Vansittart [1773] printed in *Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honorable Warren Hastings*, ed. George R. Gleig (London: Richard Bentley, 1841), 237–238.

⁸¹ Thomas Marshall "A Statistical Account of the Pergunna of Jumbooser" in *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* vol. 3 (1823), 361; Denzil Ibbetson, *Report on the Revision of the Settlement ... Karnal* (Allahabad: The Pioneer Press, 1883), 115–117.

⁸² See his speech to the Round Table Conference in 1931, reprinted in Cyril H. Philips, ed., *The Evolution of India and Pakistan 1858–1947* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 296.

government employees.⁸³ Clearly therefore, the perpetuation of the system depended in great measure on the colonial government's unwillingness to forgo the financial advantages it derived from it.

This was not exclusively a matter of caste: landless and poor households were selectively burdened by such exactions. For example, in the 1820s groups of Bhil tribals were induced to come down from the hills and settle near the villages in Khandesh, north Maharashtra. Colonial officials believed that they would be integrated into the village servant system and live peacefully thereafter as they had "traditionally" done. The struggle over what was "traditional and customary" now began, and the officer responsible for their resettlement warned that oppression could force them back into banditry. He recommended that:

Services expected to be performed by Bheels of the Plains in the vicinity of Hindoo Villages in consideration of grants of Land *require to be more strictly defined*. No Bheel should be compelled to labour or forced to plough for less than Hindoo labourers, or for less wages than other Ploughmen receive; ... Another most serious grievance is that in a village however well populated, not a Cart, a Bullock, a Driver, Guide or Begarree [forced laborer] ... will be furnished by the Native Local Authorities from the Caste Inhabitants whilst any can possibly be pressed from the limited resources of the wretched Bheels at and in the neighbourhood of the village.⁸⁴

Such tussles did not only occur with socially alien groups like the Bhils. They were a general feature of times when the agrarian order was recovering from disruption. This was the case in Pune district around 1710 when Pilāji Jājīdhav, an important official of the Maratha state, wrote to the village officers of the region:

You reported that your province had long been desolate. But that it was now fortunately being resettled once again. All the villages were populated once more. The [holders of] the twelve *balutās* had all returned to the villages. But they began demanding exorbitant amounts in the name of customary dues. They demanded everything you [the farmers] possessed on account of dues. So you asked us to fix the dues. So we collected everyone and considered past usage and fixed the customs. Everyone is now to conform to this settlement.⁸⁵

⁸³ Chairman: O.H.B. Starte, *Report of the Depressed Classes and Aboriginal Tribes Committee* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1930), 46–47.

⁸⁴ Bheel Agent to Collector of Candeish, 30 June 1825 in Maharashtra State Archives, Pune, Deccan Commissioner's Records, Vol. 202 doc. no. 1782. Emphasis added.

⁸⁵ Appasaheb Pavar, ed., *Tārābāikālīna Kāgadpatre—khand pahilā* (Kolhapur: Shivaji Vidyapith, 1969), 335–337. The language of this order obviously reflects the way the dispute was presented to Pilāji by the headmen and local gentry.

Such pronouncements may have reduced conflicts, but conflict was always present, and recurred as individuals felt that they could exploit some fresh advantage. This occurred regardless of high or low status. I quote one example from the surviving records of the period. In the mid-eighteenth century Ranojī, the headman of a village near Sāsvaḍ, complained of the novel and excessive demands made by the village astrologer-Brahman (*joṣī*). He stated that this functionary had hitherto accepted various small cash payments from poorer families in lieu of the shawl he was entitled to receive for officiating at weddings; but he was now forcibly extracting a shawl from everyone. Again, he had formerly received dues after the paying capacity of the farmer, the yield of the field, and the quality of the season had all been taken into account. (In other words, he had bargained from a position of weakness.) But now he simply sent his foreign slave-woman to the fields with a horse, and she took as large a bundle as she wanted and loaded it on the horse. If the farmer protested, she abused him vilely. When the headman had gone to speak with the *joṣī* about this, the latter had threatened him with a stick. The change in behavior can be explained by the fact that the *joṣī* was now connected by marriage to the hereditary officers of the subdivision; clearly he was emboldened by this new alliance to enlarge his perquisites beyond the earlier “customary” level.⁸⁶

The fact of constant, if less dramatic, dickering over the quantity and quality of payments was suggested by W.H. Sykes, who traveled through western Maharashtra for four years (1825–1829) in his capacity as statistical reporter to the Government of Bombay and made minute inquiries in dozens of villages.

Very rarely could I get either farmer or Bullootehdar to state specifically what the one gave, and the other was entitled to receive; it depended very much upon the crops, *and also upon the extent of services performed for each individual cultivator.*

He was told by farmers in many parts of the region that they surrendered a quarter of the crop on account of *balutā* and other dues in kind.⁸⁷

Occasionally such friction erupted into full-scale confrontation—so, for instance, the dispute between the Mahars of Rak and its headman went up to the great noble Fatehsinh Bhosle in 1738, and was settled only at his direction. The document enumerated the dues and duties of the Mahars

⁸⁶ R.V. Oturkar, ed., *Patravayavahāra*, 65–66.

⁸⁷ W.H. Sykes, “Special Report,” 292, 291 (emphasis added).

on various occasions and ordered both sides to conform. Even religious functions were open to contest; thus in 1754, the Mahars of Sasvad contested the right of another Dalit caste to carry an earthen pot around the village as a part of the rite of exorcism. They were asked to produce evidence from the neighboring villages that Mahars did indeed have such rights. They sought to do so, and then realized that this was against the usage of the country and withdrew their claims.⁸⁸ Rival low-caste communities were often used to curb each other—in Sarola Kasar, a village in Ahmednagar district, the villagers replaced one such group with another at some time in the 1920s.⁸⁹

More extensive monetization, the gradual extinction of forced labor for government purposes, and social protests by the Dalit classes marked relations between farmers and village servants by the early twentieth century. This tension forms a major theme in an early classic of Maharashtrian rural sociology, T.N. Atre's *Gāṁv Gāḍā*, which is however written exclusively from the landholders' point of view. Atre, a middle-ranking colonial official with many decades' experience, stated that unredressed rural grievances were advertised by the poisoning of cattle. If such cases became frequent in a village, then the government authorities temporarily confiscated the Mahars' patrimony on the assumption that they were behind the poisonings. Atre also describes how the district officers had (under Section 18 of the Watan Act) to assemble arbitration councils (*pancāyat*) headed by the district collector, in order to settle these disputes. If the council failed to reach a decision within seven days, then the collector gave a binding award.⁹⁰ Atre also wrote that the Mahars in his time only rendered free service to important people, such as the headman, the district hereditary officers, and a few big farmers—and that, too, after they had been sought out and summoned. Exactly the same calculation was found by J.C. Jack in the Bengal delta. In this land of new settlement, landowners had granted rent-free lands to village barbers and similar functionaries, but these now only served the landlord and bargained for any service rendered to fellow villagers.⁹¹

Atre also describes the collection of customary dues as a deeply conflict-ridden process; for example, he narrates how village watchmen always went in bands to confront the farmer in his field.

⁸⁸ Both cases from Oturkar, *Patrayavahāra*, 31–32, 38.

⁸⁹ L.B. Jagalpure and K.D. Kale, *Sarola Kasar* (Ahmednagar: L.B. Jagalpure, 1938), 385.

⁹⁰ This special legislation is in itself testimony to the frequency of such conflict.

⁹¹ J.C. Jack, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement operations in the Faridpur District, 1904 to 1914* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1916), 142.

Going in a band means that argument, pressure and threat are deployed To sum up, claims of entitlement, friendly pleas, begging, flattery and pilferage follow each other like beads on the same thread.

If caught pilfering by an enraged farmer, Atre continues, the landless castes appeased him by saying:

'Balirājā! We are your footwear! How can we fill our stomachs?' If that does not make him subside, these people say 'Well, well! Is it thus?' and utter words importing bloodshed and mayhem. The poor farmer fears that they may fulfill their threats by theft, by arson or by poisoning his cattle. So he perforce allows them to carry away what they have already pilfered.⁹²

Atre presents a vivid but one-sided view of the situation. In reality, here as elsewhere in India, the balance of power was tilted in favor of the landowners, and the twentieth century saw a steady decline in the dues received by village servants. The Gokhale Institute of Pune pioneered rural surveys in western India in the 1930s and has maintained a fine tradition of intensive village studies. M.B. Jagtap worked on the first survey of Wai subdivision in 1936–1938, and on resurveys in 1942–1943, 1944–1945, 1959–1960 and 1966–1967. He lived mainly in his study villages from 1935 to 1952.⁹³ His study of these villages through thirty years was published in 1970. Already by the 1930s, there were several villages without *balutedārs*, and others where some functions were performed by craftsmen from elsewhere for cash payment. By the 1950s, some *balutedārs* had also ceased asking for dues and preferred to work for cash payment. Jagtap notes that the system was better preserved in villages like Gulumb, away from the main roads, which depended on local supplies and services. In 1936–1937, 10.98 percent of the main food grain crops was paid out to *balutedārs* in Gulumb, as against a low of 5.54 percent in well-connected Ozarde. The average for three villages was 7.04 percent. (We may recollect that in the 1820s, Sykes had been told that 25 percent of the crop was paid out as dues in kind.) By 1959–1960, the share had fallen to 3.69 percent and, as food prices rose sharply in the 1960s, to a negligible 1.83 percent in 1966–1967. Jagtap explained this by the stoppage of payments to *balutedārs* who were no longer needed and the employment of craftsmen on a cash basis as required. Technological change also made it profitable to displace some: pumps replaced leather buckets

⁹² T.N. Atre, *Gāṇv Gāḍā*, first published 1915, repr. (Pune: Varada, 1989), 90, 96, 99–102. No less an authority than D.R. Gadgil acknowledged the importance of Atre's book; see n. 93.

⁹³ D.R. Gadgil, "Preface" to V.M. Dandekar and M.M. Jagtap, *Mahārāṣṭrācī Grāmīṇa Samā-jaracanā* (Pune: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics 1957), 1–3.

in irrigation and the services of the leather worker came to an end. The largest proportionate reduction was (*pace* Dumont) in payments to sacred functionaries. The murder of Mahatma Gandhi by a Brahman led to the stoppage of payments to the (Brahman) *joṣī* in Gulumb and Kavthe after 1948. By the 1960s, payments to the Mahars had also ended.⁹⁴ The refusal of dependency and rejection of beggarly payments in kind were also part of the Ambedkarite movement from the late 1920s. In her important work on Dalit politics in Western India, Anupama Rao has shown how Ambedkar actively struggled to dismantle institutions that forced village servants into servile dependence. The memoirs of Daya Pavar, a Mahar author and activist, record how these practices were eroding as early as the 1930s under the impact of Ambedkarite agitations.⁹⁵

Jagtap studied only three villages, but two members of the Gokhale Institute staff used the data from the survey of a sample of 72 villages in eight districts carried out in 1951–1952 to write a careful study of rural society in Maharashtra. The disintegration of the *balutā* system was already evident. Landless families paid cash for any services they required, and in many villages the *balutedārs* had divided client households among themselves, thus moving toward *jajmānī*. Mahars were village functionaries in 66 out of 72 villages, but only those serving government actually received any dues from the villagers. They served by rotation, and had to wait years for their turns to come up. The Mahars were much more alienated from the village system than other functionaries were. The carpenter was still the most important, and found in 60 villages. Dues varied from village to village, but were usually paid per plough—or a sort of piece-rate. Iron work being more durable, the smith was a *balutedār* in only 25 villages. Even there cash had to be paid for some jobs. Many smiths preferred to locate themselves in roadside villages or towns and work for cash. Itinerant tinkers also serviced the villages. It was difficult for the investigators to ascertain the smith's *balutā* dues—they varied by special arrangements or needs. The leather worker was a *balutedār* in 32 villages; his repair of well-buckets and harness was crucial to raising irrigated crops. I could continue. But essentially investigators everywhere found dues being reduced or adjusted according to economic need. Individual cultivators gave more or less depending on their employment of partic-

⁹⁴ M.B. Jagtap, *Vai Tālukyācyā Purva Bhāgātīl Sheṭī Vikasācī Vāṭcāl* (Pune: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics 1970), 107–114.

⁹⁵ Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 114; Daya Pavar, *Balutarīn*, sixth edition (Mumbai: Granthali, 1995), 56.

ular *balutedārs*. The amount also reflected the yield of the harvest. Still, the investigators could clearly see that the “village looks after those *balutedārs* whose absence would cause difficulty; the others are pushed away.”⁹⁶

The same pattern was found in western U.P., where village servants paid by a fee on each plough had been common in the early nineteenth century. By the 1950s, relations between the dominant (Jat) peasant community and their priests had deteriorated sharply with hostility and suspicion on both sides. “Brahmins revenge themselves upon Jats by inciting and helping, and sometimes acting as leaders of, the lower castes in their struggle against Jat dominance.” Tensions had developed with carpenters’ claims to higher status—but these artisans were vital for farming, so the carpenters and blacksmiths still had the largest annual payments. Both these castes were employed without regard to their being Hindu or Muslim. Water carriers had branched into new trades, and the wealth thus acquired made them “pretty well independent of Jat economic and political pressures.” Leather makers, on the other hand, still depended on landowning Jats for employment, and the latter used this to “humiliate and exploit the [Dalits] by word and deed whenever they find an opportunity.”⁹⁷ The further fragmentation of Jat landholding because of population growth has reduced this power: at present, Dipankar Gupta tells us, the Jats are no longer employers but often seekers of casual labor themselves. They can no longer coerce the other castes as they formerly did.⁹⁸

Thus even where the village servant system had official recognition and support, it was continually restructured according to calculations of individual advantage and ultimately largely abandoned. So, to sum up: many anthropologists have tended to take the frequently observed dyadic relation of service and dependence as a given, as stemming from deep-seated cultural traits or fundamental values in Indian society. Historians have been skeptical of this and inclined to argue that the dyadic relations observed in the twentieth century were a comparatively recent phenomenon as a consequence of the breakdown of previously extant village communities

⁹⁶ V.M. Dandekar and M.M. Jagtap, *Mahārāṣṭrācī Grāmīṇa Samājaracanā* (Pune: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1957), 45–70. These intensive team studies of a scientifically selected sample of villages are significantly more dependable than the assortments of single villages in various regions at various times from which anthropological models have typically been constructed.

⁹⁷ Mahesh C. Pradhan, *The Political System of the Jats of Northern India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 41–49.

⁹⁸ Dipankar Gupta, *Caged Phoenix*, 180–181.

resulting from changes inaugurated by colonialism. The evidence suggests that both patron-client pairs and village servant systems have existed or been altogether absent at various times in different regions. But we need probe deeper and ask: what explains the existence of the complex, patrimonial village servant system in at least some regions during the precolonial era?

The Genesis of a "Traditional Institution"

It is noticeable that all the scholars who have studied this problem have assumed that the village organization is itself a relatively unproblematic structure—arising perhaps out of the functional needs of isolated rural life.⁹⁹ Yet it is striking that the system was strongly developed not in the most isolated regions of eighteenth-century Maharashtra, but rather in its densely settled and commercialized regions. Much (indeed almost all) of our evidence on its functioning comes from official efforts at its regulation and control. I suggest that this formal and regular structuring originated in the opportunity for the securing of rents (as fees or gifts or bribes) and the consequent preparedness of entrepreneurial individuals to pay the holders of political authority for the creation and protection of such rights. An important aspect of the *jajmānī* system is then merely one example of widespread phenomenon—rent-seeking and the investment of resources in creating permanent, heritable sources of rents. It is significant that these village offices were called *watan* (sometimes *vr̥tti*—both best translated as patrimony), and thus seen as analogous to other property rights in venal office.

Thus at the same time as the detailed descriptions of village servants with fixed dues in kind were being compiled in western Maharashtra, little trace of any such system could be found in thinly populated areas where the cash economy was undeveloped and the need for fixed services should have been all the greater. For example, Chhattisgarh (formerly part of the state of Madhya Pradesh) was in the early nineteenth century a landlocked region with limited trade. When Richard Jenkins wrote his report in 1827, he remarked on the absence of *watandārs*—that is, of headmen or peasants possessed of hereditary rights in this area, in contrast with the Maratha

⁹⁹ Altekar, *Village Communities*; Ellis *Papers*, 4–6 describes geographical variation in southern India.

territories to the west. The establishment of village servants was equally undeveloped, and those who existed were mainly employed by the *gaontia* headman (effectively a tax farmer) of each village. Even the barber “owes professional services to all the village community, but is chiefly employed by the village lord.” Only the smith and washerman seem to have been mainly employed for the benefit of the farming community as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Thus craftsmen and specialists were seen as dependents of the village lord, exactly like tenant farmers.

Much of Jenkins’s knowledge was drawn from men like Vinayakrao Aurangabadkar, whom he employed as an assistant for nearly twenty years. Vinayakrao spent over three years traveling from village to village in Varhad and Chhattisgarh, interviewing and collecting information on local geography, institutions, antiquities, and practices. The hundreds of folios of his notes deposited in the India Office Collection in London bear impressive witness to his industry and command of languages. Much of the material consists of direct transcripts of interviews and answers to questions.

These field notes therefore give us a fine-grained picture of village institutions and traditions in the early nineteenth century. Reading them, we find that both *balutā* and *jajmānī* had a very limited presence in this area. Thus Vinayakrao interviewed Bhimrai Thakur and other Halba landholders of Panadur. They understood the term *balutā* and responded: “there are no *balutedārs* in Chhattisgad, but they are found in Panadur—the carpenter receives three measures of grain per plough as does the smith. What the barber gets is determined by each farmer individually. If the local priest, Gond priest etc were employed *that year* they get a basket of grain plus two more measures.”¹⁰¹ It is clear that the really essential functionaries had established a fixed claim; others, including those concerned with purity (the barber) and the supernatural (the priest), had a quasi-wage relationship. This was in a small town. In the smaller villages nearer the mountains the local Kavar chiefs stated flatly: “In our country, the custom of *balotedari* does not exist; however the smith-carpenter receives 10 measures of grain for each plough.”¹⁰²

The smith would obviously be a vital functionary in a farming economy, and it would be rational to pay him by the year rather than have to bargain

¹⁰⁰ Jenkins, *Report on the Territories of the Raja of Nagpur 1827* (Nagpur: Government Press, 1923), 111.

¹⁰¹ British Library, London: Oriental and India Office Collection [henceforth BL, OIOC] Mss Marathi D 35, fol. 35a. Emphasis added.

¹⁰² OIOC Mss Marathi D 46 fol. 231b.

every time a plough-share had to be replaced or a tool repaired. The *khāti*—carpenter-cum-smith—therefore crops up in almost every account. So in Kanker subdivision, there were no village accountants, and Vinayakrao noted that there were no carpenters—people did their own woodwork; but the smith was present and received a basketful of grain for each plough. His clients had to bring their own iron. The washerman was given half or three-quarter *sers* of grain for each job. The *bhumak* [local priest] and the barber received some dues regularly.¹⁰³ Similarly, when landholders in Bhadak (modern Chandrapur district of Maharashtra) were questioned about the costs of cultivation, they reported that each plough paid the smith-cum-carpenter ten measures while the local priest, the village watchman, and the local priest received one measure each.¹⁰⁴ Yet again in Balapur subdivision, the village headmen told him that the *havalḍār*, a functionary who helped collect the land-tax, received two rupees each month from the village fund; in addition, farmers might give him, “at pleasure,” up to one large measure of grain yearly.¹⁰⁵ This official had been introduced by the centralizing regime of the Bhosle kings, before the British took over, and we can see that his perquisites were beginning to harden into custom.

In other places, it is evident that such perquisites were beginning to appear as a consequence of the creation of various offices under Bhosle rule, which was accompanied by population growth and commercialization. As these became offices of profit, individuals would begin to acquire and dispute them, providing a political and fiscal resource for the regime to exploit. In the Chimur division, for example, the bigger villages had a functionary called *havalḍār* who allocated compulsory labor between households, and who would consequently have considerable powers of harassment, which he evidently turned to advantage. So the local people reported that in some places he received a *kudo* of grain from each farmer, though it was not an approved usage. The headman’s messenger and assistant held rent-free land from the state, but also received a measure of grain from each peasant. State obligations fell on every office holder. Even the local priest or *bhumak* was supposed to feed government messengers if they came to the village and carry messages for the headman. He did, however, protect the village from tigers and so received two measures of grain.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Ibid., fol. 61b.

¹⁰⁴ OIOC Mss Marathi D 44 fol. 118a.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., fol. 108b.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., Account of Chimur Q. 40.

Umrad was a relatively more prosperous subdivision near Nagpur—much cloth was woven for export and there was an active trade in cotton, grain, and so on. The term *bārābalute* was known here, but the functionaries listed were: Vasi (local priest), [amount illegible]; Mahar, ten *kudo* measures; sorcerer, one measure; astrologer, one measure; local priest, one measure; village watchman-cum-messenger, one and a quarter measures.¹⁰⁷ But there were no hereditary holders, and not even a village headman whose family had held the office for generations could claim it as a patrimony.¹⁰⁸ This is a marked contrast to the more densely settled and commercialized lands of western Maharashtra, where saleable hereditary office was institutionalized by the sixteenth century, if not earlier. The reason was (I suggest) that the cash economy and competition made hereditary office a desirable acquisition and its creation and adjudication a source of profit to the state and its ever-hungry local functionaries.

The way in which the regulation of the *balutā* system could be used to fiscal advantage can be demonstrated by a few extracts from the surviving ledgers of several tax farmers from western Maharashtra. These span the period from about 1750 to 1825.¹⁰⁹ (I could cite many more examples from other sources.)

Half a rupee [fine realized]	Mahar did not serve the village properly
One rupee	Leather-worker left the village of Pisarve and went to Amboli
22 rupees	Saheb Mitekhan beat a Mahar
One rupee	Leather worker left the village work undone, so he was made to complete it and fined
One and a quarter rupees	Santu Potter failed to supply the mask for Mahālakṣmī, so fined

I would suggest that the opportunities for such fees and fines as well as the ruling classes' need for specialized services from the villages on a reliable basis was important in the transformation of village specialists into hereditary office-holders. The maintenance of fees and rights for the unskilled landless was, as I have already shown, due to their being important for royal functionaries. The changing social and economic conditions we reviewed earlier led to the gradual demise of the institution in the twentieth century.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Account of Umrad Q. 19 and 40.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., Umrad Q. 9.

¹⁰⁹ N.G. Capekar cited in Guha, "Civilisations, Markets", 101.

But individualized jockeying for social and economic advantage was present at all times. It will be evident that I am deeply skeptical of attempts to trace socio-economic institutions to fundamental values. I have found considerable evidence to suggest that individuals systematically sought to modify and invent customs and institutions to their own perceived advantage, and that the patrimonial and early colonial state tried to derive fiscal and political advantage from these efforts. Intercaste relationships and the idyllic village itself existed through the constant contest of unequal powers. The varying outcome of these ceaseless contests explains why institutions varied considerably at different times and in different regions. Society was never static in some 'traditional' mode, and the bitter contests for political power and social status that rend the villages today are not as novel as they may seem.

CHAPTER FOUR

A LOCUS OF SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION: THE HOUSEHOLD

[T]he political system uses the kinship system as the individual does, opportunistically and to purposes of its own that do not belong to the kinship system as such.

– Thomas Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*.¹

Domesticity and Power in Social Theory

The reader will by now have observed the general thrust of this book is to link the processes of social life to those reproducing sociopolitical power. In the previous chapter I have demonstrated that the seemingly autonomous structures of village life were in fact patterned by the exercise of power. This chapter will look at another bounded institution—the household, and similarly connect it to larger patterns of authority. I use the term household deliberately in order to separate it from ‘family’ as kin unit and also render the common Hindustani *khāna* (‘house’ in its widest sense) into English. The word entered a number of Indian languages and referred to both a bounded space and to the nexus of social relations that it delimited. These included, but were not limited to, kinship. But analysts have tended to conflate kin-unit and household as in the case of David Mandelbaum, a veteran student of Indian society who in 1970 published a two-volume synthesis of the received scholarly wisdom on India. Mandelbaum nested the family, defined by marriage and descent at the core of both *jāti* and village. The *jāti* was fundamental to village society and kinship fundamental to *jāti*. “All of a person’s kin by descent and marriage both actual and potential, are within his *jāti*; none are outside it.”² The centrality of affinity and alliance to

¹ See p. 119 for the Trautmann reference.

² David G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India* 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 1: 3, 16, 33.

the constitution of human society was an important current in scholarship at the time: it was famously the burden of Levi-Strauss's then just-translated classic *Elementary Structures of Kinship*.³ But the household contained more than a mere nexus of kin relations. It was a center of power relations and indeed, of much economic life.

Chapter 2 of this book has shown that it is productive to view the state as constituted by the successful attenuation and delimitation of preexisting networks of power (as proposed by Michael Mann.) The most basic of such networks radiated from the household. The "big man" who would grow into a lord would first of all concentrate power in his household and use his dependents as agents of the proto-state.⁴ We have in Chapter 3 already considered how locality, village, and *jāti* were shot through with power relationships linking them to the processes of governance. If indeed as Mandelbaum suggests, the family was the fundamental unit of *jāti* and village life, then we should expect to find it similarly shot through with power relations. This chapter will show how the household was historically marked by networks of power that stretched up to royal courts. So I will develop the historical evidence around this aspect of social life to correct what Indrani Chatterjee has described as the anachronistic insertion of modern, fixed ideas of conjugality into earlier times. I will begin with a consideration of kingly or 'great households', Hindu and Muslim, that were the effective centers of power in historic South Asia. I will then consider how despite ideologies of 'blood' and 'bodily substance', the necessities of this political function affected the making and unmaking of both kinship and caste fellowship. These were the small-scale practices that "produced familial structures as well as power and rule, and tied multiple families together in "'caste' and 'community.'"⁵ But if the household was the keystone of political power, its subversion would be an important tactic of conquest. It could (I will show) equally be a source of both political loyalty and fiscal advantage. Furthermore, since as Mandelbaum pointed out, the conjugal unit was the building block of the *jāti*, conflict around its regulation would inevitably be fought in the *jāti* itself, but also spill over beyond it. The family, furthermore, was also a property-holding body. If the broils of the great afforded political advan-

³ Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* revised edition, J.H. Bell and R. von Sturmer, trans. (Boston: Beacon Books, 1969).

⁴ Marshall Sahlins, "Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5 (1963): 285–303.

⁵ Indrani Chatterjee, 'Introduction,' to *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 13–14.

tages or monetary windfalls to central authority, the disputes of the humble afforded opportunities for the ubiquitous minor functionaries patronized by the great. These structures of fiscal and sociopolitical surveillance and exploitation thus made the domestic an aspect of the political economy of South Asia. Finally, I again draw on Indrani Chatterjee to argue that early colonial rule also managed kinship and family formation to political ends. Thereby it shaped a crucial ethnic boundary between English-born and India-born that underpinned the allegiances upon which early colonial rule was founded.

Kingship and the Household in South Asia

The royal household or palace was at the apex of the sociopolitical system. The famous *Arthaśāstra* spent considerable time on the political perils that lurked within the royal household and commented on the need to protect kings from their wives and sons.⁶ But the palace, a household writ large, was also a template for the state, as Max Weber pointed out decades ago. In kingly households, persons with permanent functions were household officials. Their functions outside the household “are often in fields of activity which bear a relatively superficial analogy to their household function.”⁷ Thomas Trautmann elaborated on this idea in 1981:

With the advent of the state, the publicly recognized distribution of power constitutes itself as a system in its own right, whether we look at it as a collection of institutions with mechanisms for perpetuating themselves, or a network of alliances uniting centers of power into a more or less cohesive, hierarchical order. Where hereditary kingship exists or indeed wherever political office is transmitted by descent, the political and kinship systems come together, but only in a part of their proper domains, so that it is never possible to reduce the one to the other. Insofar as the political system makes use of kinship structures to perpetuate itself through a rule of hereditary succession to office, or to constitute a set of political alliances through marriage, it does so in response to imperatives that are distinctly political ones.⁸

⁶ “The king when protected, can protect the kingdom ... to begin with, he has to be protected from his wives and sons”; Kangle, ed., *Arthaśāstra* vol. 1, Book 1, Chapter 17, śloka 1. The fissiparous effect of tensions arising from restrictions on marital and commensal solidarity was likewise emphasized in the section on the penetration and destruction of tribal (*saṅgha*) solidarity. Ibid., Book 11, Chapter 11, ślokas 10–12.

⁷ Weber, *Economy and Society*, I, 229.

⁸ Trautmann, *Dravidian Kinship*, 357–358; emphasis added.

Thus the state was a later and more complex institution that used terms and practices drawn from kinship systems, including metaphorical and actual paternity, to larger ends. But kingly families themselves were usually part of an elite or nobility from which they emerged and into which they might subside. Their familial structures were therefore replicated at various levels in the hierarchy. Such processes necessarily reordered and reinvented kinship and the household itself.

The Mughal emperors, for example, created categories of fictive kinship, such as descendants of children of the royal wet-nurses and even sons of royal servants who were therefore deemed as “born in the house” (*khānazād*).⁹ The latter category became an important aspect of imperial management, with a common idiom of service and devotion that was supposed to motivate a diverse nobility. As John Richards wrote, “nobles who called themselves *khānazāds* were gradually forming a cohesive, identifiable group that viewed imperial service and preference within that service as its prerogative.”¹⁰ As we shall see, similar phenomena extended well beyond the elite, impinging upon the everyday lives and transactions of people as lowly as leatherworkers in Vasai and as elevated as the Peśvā and the Nizam of Hyderabad. This chapter also proposes that the intensive penetration and exploitation of social institutions in the early modern period did not leave the family unscathed.

Most of this book deals with a time when the monarchical state was already a long-established and seemingly eternal institution. This did not mean that individual domains were securely grounded—rulers could rarely rest easy. Subversion, aggression, and disintegration were constant dangers to be warded off by constant vigilance. Institutions, to quote Weber again, are merely long-repeated and stable patterns of meaningful action. Those who wished to gain or maintain power with an economy of effort would exploit allegiances and hatreds already generated within society—and property, status/caste, and kinship were the most enduring and pow-

⁹ Wheeler M. Thackston, ed. and trans., *The Jahangirnama: Memoirs of Jahangir, Emperor of India* (Oxford University Press in association with the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC, 1999), 467. The *khānazāds* would in a sense be royal fosterlings in various aristocratic households, thus offering an institutional parallel to the Central Asian practice of actually sending royal children to be fostered by others and thus creating nuclei of loyalty in outlying places. See Peter Parkes, “Fosterage, Kinship and Legend: When Milk was Thicker Than Blood,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 46, (2004): 587–615.

¹⁰ John F. Richards, “Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, Barbara D. Metcalf, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 262–263.

erful sources of usable affect. This is why the publication in 1983 of André Wink's *Land and Sovereignty in India* represented a major advance in our understanding of political relations in South Asia. In an attempt to shift the focus of historians away from overarching classical and prescriptive ideologies of kingship, Wink focused on specific strategies of power available to potential hegemons. He notes that we find the fourfold Sanskrit formula for overcoming an enemy frequently invoked in the writings of eighteenth-century India: *sāma-dāna-bheda-daṇḍa*.¹¹ The first term means (in this context) pleasing speech; the second, gift or tribute; and the third (*bheda*—splitting), creating divisions within the opposing camp; force was the last resort. The use of intra-family feuds to weaken an enemy corresponded to this third tactic of conquest. Wink proposed that the use of *fitna* (from the Arabic) and *bheda* (from the Sanskrit)—referring to intrigue, seduction, and sedition—were central to the constitution and maintenance of sovereignty in early modern India. The structure of vested rights/property was shot through with conflict and rivalry; adroit exploitation of these to create allegiance was the means to state power.¹² The exploitation of both familial loyalties and their obverse—familial hatreds—was an important resource for this strategy. As Wink observes, arbitration in family quarrels was merely another way in which the sovereign could extend his influence through the utilization of preexisting conflicts: “they remained contained as long as the sovereign power could tip the scales but erupted afresh as soon as sovereignty was disputed or factionalized.”¹³

Although historical records of early modern India certainly evoke a widespread and shared ethos of kin obligation, they simultaneously indicate that familial relationships, like others, were subject to manipulation and management. In many parts of the world, the premodern family included a range of dependencies, at the extreme end of which was slavery.¹⁴ The pioneering work of Indrani Chatterjee explored this for South Asia by deploying

¹¹ Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India*, 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 160–161, 180–182.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 162. Wink illustrates this with two studies of the Jagdales of Masur and the Jedhe family of Kari. A.R. Kulkarni has traced these processes in a more complete study of the latter family, the Jedhes of Kari; A.R. Kulkarni, “The Jedhe Gharane,” in *Home, Family and Kinship in Maharashtra*, Irina Glushkova and Rajendra Vora, eds. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 173–184.

¹⁴ John Locke famously included slaves, men and women and the children born to them in the West India planter's ‘family’. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Glasgow: printed by W. Paton for R. Smith, Bookseller and D. Bray, Publisher, 1796); downloaded from the ECCO database, 164.

the slavery-to-kinship continuum proposed by Miers and Kopytoff. Their book, *Slavery in Africa* observed that slave-consorts brought no entangling kin with them, and their sons were therefore preferred as heirs.¹⁵ Chatterjee also found the occasional deployment of this device in the Indian subcontinent. At the same time, equal-status partners were useful symbols of alliance and allegiance. As Chatterjee pointed out, the “historical evidence around Indian kinship is full of the multiple and layered meanings of identical kinship terms, and kin-forming rituals. Where slave women were ‘married’ plural forms of marriage existed.”¹⁶ This pattern is confirmed by the evidence of John Malcom, who comments on the biography of the chief consort of Yar Muhammad Khan of Bhopal who, as a widow effectively ruled the state for several decades:

She came from Upper Hindustan but seems to have been of too obscure an origin to leave any record of her parents or place of birth. Though never publicly married to the Nabob Yar Mahomed, she became the principal lady of his family. [Note from the original: The Nikah was performed on her union with the Nabob. This engagement, though inferior to marriage is still respectable. It is common where the condition of the parties is too unequal to admit of one more legitimate.]¹⁷

Furthermore, Chatterjee pointed out, some slaves may have originated in “voluntary” sale or gifts by their own kinsmen, who thus alienated them to others. Thus one must agree that the household was a broad and porous unit, containing lesser kin who formed part of the potentially realizable wealth of the establishment. These issues and opportunities were best expressed in the great or kingly households, perched at the precarious pinnacles of power.¹⁸ As Trautmann commented, kings drew heavily upon the repertoire of lineage-building strategies to construct their states. And as Chatterjee showed, they also intensified the strategies of incorporation and alienation in the constant struggles for control of these complex organizations. Finally, the incorporation of women of diverse backgrounds was common even where the rules of caste were actively enforced by the state, as a case involving the gardener caste of Sāsvaḍ shows. A caste member instigated a boycott of another by claiming that the latter’s mother was of

¹⁵ Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., Editorial Introduction to *Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 31–32.

¹⁶ Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford India paperback, 2001), 26.

¹⁷ Malcom, *Memoir* 1, 367–368.

¹⁸ Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*, 26, 27.

unknown origin. This dispute was settled with an order that as the matter was old, no inquiries should be made into her caste origin and everyone should maintain caste unity.¹⁹

Inventing Kin

In this context, kinship and exclusion from the kin were both socially constructed statuses, and a person could move from one to the other in the course of a lifetime; this was recognized in the historical traditions of western India. So, for example, the careful V.V. Khare wrote a history of the Icalcaranji domain (north Karnataka) in which he recounted the tradition of how Narayaṇa Pant, son of a Brahman from the Konkan, lost his father at an early age. His widowed mother came east with her son and took shelter in the stables of the great Maratha general Santāji Ghorpaḍe. The child caught Ghorpaḍe's eye and was brought into the inner circle of the great house. "This fondness grew until one day when Santāji was sitting down to eat his senior wife said jokingly 'Since you call Nāropant your son, what is wrong if he follows the custom of our people and sits down on your mat to eat with you?'" The tradition continues that Nāropant immediately sat down and prepared with one hand to take a handful of cereal (*anna*) and to tear his sacred thread with the other. At this point, Santāji stopped him, saying "Enough! You have passed the test. If I call you my son (*lek*) it does not mean that you have to forsake your own caste (*svajāti*)." Nāropant in gratitude to his patron adopted the Maratha clan-name Ghorpade as his own. Later he too nurtured a Brahman boy, Narasimharāo, of obscure parentage.

Khare notes that some records describe this child as a fosterling (*po-shaṇa*) and others as an adopted son (*dattaka*). As an adult, this Narasimharāo added Nārāyaṇa as a patronymic, suggesting lineal affiliation. But late in life, Narasimharāo's wife bore a son who was named Venkatrao, who was then married to the daughter of the first Peśvā Balaji Visvanath and hence the sister of the second Peśvā Bajirao I (in office 1720–1740). The Peśvās now took steps to give Narasimharāo a separate fief on condition of his transferring his allegiance to the Peśvā and leaving the Ghorpaḍe household where he had grown up. This one may suppose, would clear the way for Venkatrao and his powerfully connected wife to take full control

¹⁹ Oturkar, *Patrayavahāra*, 125.

of the appanage. But it would also give the Peśvā an informed insider's access to a potential rival house.²⁰

So we find a child being groomed for son-ship and then ejected from that status. These cases of course refer to waifs or even foundlings. But there were also those who were acquired as slaves or captives and incorporated into the structures of the state. This practice has been most noticed as "military slavery," especially in the Islamic world. But the practice was, as Indrani Chatterjee showed in 1999, much more widespread than that.²¹ Not just soldiers but also servants of all kinds and of various ages and sexes were acquired and deployed within households, great and small. Many entered as slaves, and some moved out of that status and closer to the kin end of the spectrum. John Malcolm described the practice in the Bhopal family:

Hiyat Mahomed Khan, when installed Nabob, had no children by his wife, but he had adopted four Chelahs, or family dependants who were considered almost as relations. [*Note by Malcolm*]: Chelah means literally an adopted dependant; it neither applies to a slave nor to an adopted child, but to a person who is admitted to the claims of a dependant relation.²²

The distinct status and political roles of slaves and the slave-born was an old trope in the Indian subcontinent, as in the story of the birth of Vidura, half-brother to the kings Dhritarāstra and Pāṇḍu, in the *Mahābhārata*.²³ Stories illustrating the status and use of slave-born children are also present in the Buddhist tradition. Although it cannot be dated earlier than the mid-first millennium CE, the story of Ajātaśatru, Viḍudabha, and the extermination of the Śākya is still old enough to be relevant to our purposes. It explained the extermination of the Śākya tribe, to which the Buddha had belonged. The king of Kosala demanded a bride from the clan to be his wife. But they thought it demeaning to agree, and instead sent a slave-born daughter,

²⁰ The two paragraphs above draw heavily upon joint work with Indrani Chatterjee. Chatterjee and Guha, "Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince: Slavery and Social Poverty in Eighteenth-century India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36, 2 (1999): 167–169.

²¹ Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*.

²² Malcolm, *Memoir* 1, 365–366; During one of the Nizam al Mulk's campaigns, some villagers were seized by his soldiers. Four young girls among them were handed over to the widow of Murshid Quli Khan; two young boys to the medical establishment. Mansaram, the Nizam's secretary wrote that the "family of these two boys is settled in Hyderabad and are known as personal attendants (Chela) of the Nizam. Masud rose to be the superintendent of the royal kitchen. He was given a mansab, the title of Khan and a Jagir." P. Setu Madhav Rao, *Eighteenth Century Deccan* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1963), 99.

²³ *The Mahābhārata*, Abridged and translated by John D. Smith (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), 38–39.

Vasabhakhattiya, to him. He treated her with great honor and Viḍudabha, his son by her, became the next king. But one day when visiting his maternal kin—that is, the Śākya clan—the prince Viḍudabha discovered that his seat was being washed with Ganges water after his departure, and the ruse was exposed. After he became king, the story runs, he had his throne washed in Śākya blood.²⁴ A more recent historical instance was gifting of Mastānī, a young Muslim woman (possibly a slave-born daughter) from the household of Chatrasāl, the Bundela king of Panna, to the Peśvā Bajirao I when the latter rescued the Bundelas from the Bangash Pathans in 1729.²⁵ Such tropes were I argue, generated not by the transmission of folktale motifs (of the type analyzed by Stith Thompson), but rather by the constant and real presence and deployment of lesser beings within great households.

*Improvising a Household and Improvising a State:
The Case of Shahu Chatrapati*

We may see some of these processes at work in the exceptionally well-documented middle and later career of the Maratha prince Shahu (later *Chatrapati*) a Mughal prisoner from 1689 to 1707. Named Shivaji after his famous grandfather, he was seized at the age of seven by the emperor Aurangzeb soon after his father Chatrapati Sambhājī was captured and put to death in 1689. The seven-year-old boy and his mother then disappeared into the seclusion of the imperial enclosure, the red screen that enclosed the imperial household in the larger sense.²⁶ Aurangzeb renamed the boy Shahu; it is noteworthy that the latter never repudiated that name and used it to the end of his life. It is likely that he was being held as a pawn who might one day be deployed to Mughal advantage. He and his half-brother Mansingh were made officers of rank 7,000 and 6,000 respectively.²⁷

²⁴ Upinder Singh, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India* (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008), 266; D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History* [1956] reprint (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2008), 159–162.

²⁵ Pramod Oak, *Peśve gharānyāca itihāsa* (Pune: Continental enlarged reprint, 1991), 208–210.

²⁶ The *gulālbar* was a screen that surrounded the imperial tents in any encampment. For the political significance of the Mughal *haram*, see Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁷ Yusuf Husain Khan, ed., *Selected Documents of Aurangzeb's Reign, 1659–1706 A.D.* (Hyderabad-Deccan: Central Records Office, Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1958), 215–217. The document calls him Sāhū walad Sambhā ‘urf (known as) Siwā.

At some point in his captivity, he was married to two daughters of prominent Maratha families, obviously so as to enhance his value in future efforts to control the Marathas. Fresh negotiations with them were begun in 1703, but no settlement was reached. Meanwhile, the Marathas largely held together under the leadership of Sambhājī's brother Rajaram and then the latter's widow, Tārābāī. Finally, after Aurangzeb's death in 1707, his son Azam Shah marched north in the (vain) hope of killing his brothers and becoming emperor. It was then that Shahu was either released or successfully escaped after the imperial camp crossed the Narmada River, the traditional northern boundary of the peninsula. But his closest kin—both of his aristocratic wives, his mother, and an obscure uncle—were taken to Delhi with the imperial camp. They were held there for more than a decade. In later times, the story was told that Shahu had been released with the blessing of the Prince Azam Shah and sent off after rounds of feasting.²⁸ The admitted fact that no documents were issued to him at the time, however, suggests otherwise. It is possible that, preoccupied with the coming struggle, Azam Shah simply wished to stir up some conflict among the Marathas to cover the rear of the imperial army as it moved north, but retained hostages so as to ensure Shahu's compliance.

After departing the Mughal camp, the young Shahu had to begin improvising a household and a government from nothing and in the face of hostility from Tārābāī, his powerful paternal aunt and the established leader of the long-sustained struggle against the Mughals. He was accompanied by Virūbāī, the consort who was to govern his household until her death in 1741.²⁹ A further obvious step was to swiftly recruit personnel from among Maratha gentry and soldiers by advertising his direct descent through the older son of the revered founder of the Maratha *swarāj*. Shahu was outstandingly successful in this and soon had a significant military following. But he evidently realized that he needed more than the unstable allegiance of these individual chiefs, and also began establishing a great household on the imperial model. Thus he acquired by various means young boys who were detached from their natal households and termed *celā bārgīr*.³⁰ By the

²⁸ Govind Sakharām Sardesai, *Marāṭhi Riyāsat* revised enlarged edition, 8 volumes S.M. Garge, chief editor (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1989–1991), 3: 23–28.

²⁹ Her life and legend are discussed more fully in Chatterjee and Guha, "Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince: Slavery and Social Poverty in Eighteenth-Century India," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36, 2 (1999).

³⁰ *Celā* usually meant disciple, *Bārgīr* meant horseman.

end of the eighteenth century, they were posted in the important charge of the royal wardrobe. Their descendants testified at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

On his march into the South, the elder Śāhu Mahāraj Chatrapati now deceased, seized our fathers who were sons of leading families (*deśmukhs* and *pāṭils*) and brought them with him. The boys were young and had no one in this country. Then the King named them his *celā bārgīrs* and fostered them and posted them in the office close to the throne. They grew up, but no one would give them their daughters. Then the King summoned the headmen of several villages and said "I have brought the sons of *deśmukhs* and *pāṭils* from that country (i.e., boys of good family), you are to give your daughters to them." Thereupon they responded "but they have no *watan* (patrimony). There should be a command from the King (about that)." Then the King satisfied them and awarded lands and daily allowances for the support of the families. These will be continued: this is why this is being recorded. Clothes at Daśahra festival and goats (for sacrifice) and dresses for the wives were all given during the reign of the elder King (Shahu). [The officer recording their claims added] 'At present they only receive goats. They will continue to get (only) that item: 2 goats.'³¹

We can see how royal power thus conferred elite status and established loyalists in the regional landed community and the Maratha caste.

At least one such boy was groomed for higher things. He had been seized during the plunder of a hostile village by Shahu's armies, and has entered history under the name of Fateh Singh Bhosle.³² Although Shahu Chatrapati was forced to leave close relatives behind in the Mughal camp, his consort Virūbāī was a major power in the kingdom even after young queens from aristocratic families had been married to the king. She sponsored the young Fateh Singh, who was clearly being groomed as a successor to Shahu—a process interrupted when Virūbāī predeceased the king. The king himself died a few years later, and Fateh Singh sought to affiliate himself (in the narrow and wide senses of that verb) with the Peśvāī. Complaining to the Peśvā (chief minister—at the time, effectively sovereign), Fateh Singh repeatedly invoked the metaphor of adoption to claim a right to support and charge a lapse of moral obligation on the part of his superiors:

Rājśrī Nānā [grandfather] took me into his lap and erected this [Fateh Singh's] chiefship. Rājśrī Rāya and Appā [addressee's father and uncle] maintained me like a brother; you also had sustained me. It is unrighteous that you

³¹ *Itihāsa Saṁgraha*, vol. 6, nos. 10–12, "Bhoslyānce kulācār," 76–77.

³² This has been extensively discussed in Chatterjee and Guha, "Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince."

should break me upon the (false) reports of people To sum up, I cannot be abandoned by you. One taken into his lap by your father, raised like a son, how can he be abandoned?³³

Though this ethic of familial care was universally acceptable, astute writers on statecraft advised caution to the dispensers of such care. For instance, a contemporary writer warned kings that the gentry of the localities were not just subjects—they were kindred, co-sharers in the realm. They could not be excluded from their inheritance; rather, they had to be adroitly managed. Among other things, the king should take care that a numerous fraternity of such gentry should not be located on their common estate, but each brother should be posted to some distinct station.³⁴

At the same time, despite the widespread idiom of familial care, contemporaries distinguished between kin. This can be illustrated by the report of a rural dispute from the mid-eighteenth century. Sidu Gurava and Siva Gurava came from the same village; the latter was senior but had gone away to work elsewhere. When he wanted to return to the village and take up his share of the service of the local deities, the customary function of Guravas, Siva protested, declaring that Sidu was not a “brother of the bone”—that is, he was merely a brother in a manner of speaking.³⁵ Likewise, the purchaser of a share in a joint estate would often be admitted as a *barādar bhāo*, fraternity brother.³⁶

Clearly, brotherhood for the purposes of property and inheritance differed from brotherhood for other purposes. Yet it is not always easy for the historian to discover the junctures at which such distinctions within kin might surface, nor the precise fiscal and political stakes involved in each intervention by ruling powers in reconstituting the family and the household. Thus outbreaks of intra-familial or intra-lineage strife are significant moments for the historical recovery of the notions and structures of the family found among various social groups in the past. But although disputes about property and wealth appear to provide the easiest points of entry into the history of familial relationships, we will note below that the state itself developed a fiscal stake in the constitution and reshaping of such relationships.

³³ Letter cited in Chatterjee and Guha, “Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince”, 183.

³⁴ S.N. Banhatti, ed., *Ājñāpatra* (Nagpur: Suvichar Prakashan Mandala) reprint 1986, 92. For a penetrating analysis of this passage see Wink, *Land and Sovereignty*, 186–189.

³⁵ Oturkar, *Patrayavahāra*, 59.

³⁶ Both words actually just mean brother: the first in Persian and the second in Marathi. But Persian was clearly official and Marathi intimate.

The Household, the Caste, and the Fisc

We have seen how states were metaphorically viewed as great households and kinship was used in generating the various forms of affect, from loyalty unto death, through allegiance down to the mere compliance that ensured the working of the large and complex organism of the early modern state. We have also seen how kin-splitting strategies (the classic *bheda*) were used to dissolve those ties in the opposing states. But the management of the household as a resource for the state went further than that. It was also an important source of funds both for the central administration and for the innumerable petty officials that operated the military fiscal state. We will now consider this aspect of state power. Household structures of all types might be subverted, including those that were far from the *jāti*-based conjugal model.

The Gosains were powerful fraternities of military ascetics. Their contingents formed an important part of many eighteenth-century armies and even the Lord Lake when in command of the East India Company army in north India thought it prudent to secure the neutrality of Gosain contingents operating on his left flank in 1803–1804.³⁷ These monastic households controlled great endowments of military power and personal wealth. This made for internal disputes that could be turned to advantage by monarchs and governors, especially those that were indebted to these establishments. This is evident, for example, in a letter written to Janoji Bhosle of Nagpur (1755–1772) by Mahānt Vaijnāthpurī Gosāvī in 1762. It tells us that Vaijnāthpurī's predecessor had been Hansapuri, and on the latter's death Vaijnāthpurī had been installed as the head. But Udepuri, a fellow member of the order (*gurubhāu*) then came back from Cuttack and disputed the succession. The matter was investigated by the government (of Janoji Bhosle), and it was demonstrated that Udepuri had no right to the headship. Then two disciples of Udepuri arrived and were again disputing Vaijnāthpurī's control of the *maṭha* (monastery). In order to prevent such persons from occupying the seat of the late Hansapuri, Vaijnāthpurī offered to return Janoji's bond for 1,800,000 rupees and thus substantially reduce his claims on the latter. He also offered to make some payments toward 'court expenses'. In return, Janoji was exhorted to henceforth keep out of the affairs of the community. The letter concludes with the categorical assertion:

³⁷ William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 106–107.

Your dealings with us are confined to money matters alone. I accept what I have written above and return the bond for eighteen lakhs [1,800,000 rupees] and will recover only the currently stipulated amount. Disputes regarding the headship and the establishment of the Daśnāmī order are not to go to you—we shall settle our own disputes.³⁸

Adjudication of disputes brought in fees, fines, and gifts to those in a position to sway the outcome, and permission to frustrate greedy relatives by adopting an heir was a fruitful source of revenue to the ruler. Nor was this solely a Maratha practice. The intensive archival work of Dilbagh Singh has shown how various norms of social regulation were used to collect a multitude of fees and fines in the Rajput kingdoms of northern Rajasthan.³⁹ Masanori Sato has found similar evidence in the Kota state records from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Sato documented that the sexual behavior of the tanner community was regulated by its *pañcāyat*, but a quarter share of any fines had to be paid to the state. As Sato comments, these *farohi*⁴⁰ documents afford not only a glimpse of the rural and town life of the time “but also of the social organization of *pañchayat* of the various social groups and its workings.” He also shrewdly notes that the state collected its one-fourth surcharge on fines levied by community organizations

for the purpose of not only punishing them for their illegal acts and increasing tax revenues but also of promoting the penetration of the state authority into every social group community as well as that of the [tanners] and controlling its every individual member through its *pañchayat*.⁴¹

These efforts were part of an ostentatious neo-orthodoxy that accompanied the efforts at state-building in this region described by Norbert Peabody.⁴² This was true not only in north-western India but also in Nepal where, as Sanjog Rupakheti has recently demonstrated, an assertive neo-Hinduism was used to push a state-building agenda in the nineteenth century.⁴³

³⁸ British Library, Marathi Mss D 35 fos. 194a–195b; my transcription and translation.

³⁹ Dilbagh Singh, “Regulating the Domestic: Notes on the Pre-colonial State and the Family,” *Studies in History* 19 (2003): 80–85.

⁴⁰ The term itself is interesting: it is derived from Persian *‘farokhtan’* to sell; that is, to sell pardon for an offense. In that sense it is the exact analogue of, the English ‘fine’ which was a payment to end a prosecution.

⁴¹ Masanori Sato, “South-eastern Rajasthan 1650–1800” in *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, Hiroyuki Kotani, ed. (Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 39, 43.

⁴² Peabody, *Hindu Kingship and Polity in Precolonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50–79.

⁴³ Sanjog Rupakheti, “Leviathan or Paper Tiger: State-Making in the Himalayas 1740–1900” (unpublished Phd thesis submitted to Rutgers University, 2012), especially Chapters 3 and 4.

Such interference seems to have been part of the fiscal strategy of every regime. In eighteenth-century Bengal and Bihar under East India Company administration, fines were part of the tax roll of each district, and cases were judged and fines collected by the tax farmer or tax collector of each area. Fines varied by capacity to pay. In this region, "women were appointed to discover cases of fornication and adultery, which were punished heavily on the production of the slightest evidence."⁴⁴ More than a century later, in the Bakarganj (now Barisal district in Bangladesh) J.C. Jack, settlement officer, observed that malicious complaints were encouraged, interference in village quarrels was extensive, and fines for the most trivial offences were enormous. Jack obtained the account book of one landlord, which closely resembles the tax-farmers' accounts from eighteenth-century western India. The landlord, for example, fined one of his tenants for an alleged affair with his own mother-in-law.⁴⁵ Logically enough, state functionaries punished those who settled disputes or offenses without paying off the state; so, for example, two men of mercantile castes in the Jaipur kingdom who settled their own quarrel were then fined for not reporting it to the state. Community councils or *pancāyats* were fined if local officials disliked their decision, or if they failed to notify the state.⁴⁶ Similarly, in the Peśvā's territories in 1766, an official who committed some infraction of religious law and arranged the purification rituals without state sanction was fined the considerable sum of 3,000 rupees.⁴⁷ So in addition to being a source of political power for the ruling houses, family broils and the regulation of sexual misconduct also supplied important fiscal resources. This was so common that when new settlers moved from other towns to congregate in the central Indian town of Ratlam in the mid-eighteenth century, the settlers obtained a charter that stipulated that none of their disputes should be taken to government officers for inquiry or decision,

that they should be exempt from belong summoned from their houses by government agents to answer charges or provide witness, and finally that if their women had illicit intercourse [with men not their husband or protector], they should not be held as having committed any offence against the

⁴⁴ B.B. Misra, *Judicial Administration of the East India Company in Bengal 1765–1782* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1961), 100–102.

⁴⁵ J.C. Jack, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the Bakarganj District 1900 to 1908* (Calcutta: Secretariat Book Depot, 1915), 80–82. Jack adds that the landlords of this district functioned as seigneurs in a way that had disappeared from adjoining areas.

⁴⁶ Dilbagh Singh, "Regulating the Domestic," 82–83, 85.

⁴⁷ Gune, *Judicial System*, 368.

Government; nor be punishable in any manner by the Government for such crimes.⁴⁸

Considerable sums were also raised by interference in family affairs; a memorandum in the Pune Archives lists some of these. For example, the rich banker Hari Cintāman Patwardhan adopted a son in 1793–1794 and paid 22,000 rupees for permission to do so. Nāro Keśava Sahasrabudhe died suddenly; his widow Mathurābāi petitioned for permission to adopt a son. This was agreed subject to a fee of 500 rupees; and so on.⁴⁹ Even if relatively few families were sufficiently significant for their politics to merge into the larger struggles by which the ruling houses maintained their power, considerable revenue was derived from adoption and succession fees. An early British account states that according to the Maratha government records, a sum of 37 million rupees came into the government coffers during the period 1761–1796 on this account—an amount equal to the tax revenue of a substantial province. The waning power of the Peśvā after that was evidenced by the fall in collections—only 3 million in the next twenty years.⁵⁰

Apart from adoptions, all kinds of family broils brought windfalls into the exchequer, since one-fourth of the disputed amount was the normal process-fee.⁵¹ So when the three Karje brothers quarreled over some property, the government settled it, but it cost the three of them a total of 25,000 rupees—half paid in cash, and half by assigning a debt owed them by the Pavār family.⁵² John Malcolm also cites a document issued to a *Huzuria* or Court confidant deputed to draw pay from the settlement of a dispute. This command was sent to Bojah Bugwan (*sic*) regarding his failure to settle claims made by Hurchund Seit: “The Sircar has deputed Govinda Mungutia, *Huzooria* whose Mussala (*douceur*) is fixed at five hundred rupees and a Kummer Khola [surcharge on a transaction] of a hundred rupees, besides his daily subsistence of five rupees in money. The maintenance of him, a Jawos (*hirkarah*) who attends on him and his horse is also to be given.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, 1: 565, footnote.

⁴⁹ Maharashtra State Archives, Pune Sanika Rūmal no. 55, Pudke 4 docs. 24312–24313.

⁵⁰ R.D. Choksey, ed., *Ratnagiri Collectorate 1821–1829* (Poona: Published by the author, 1958), 28.

⁵¹ SSRPD Part 7 vol. 2. p. 163 (uncle and nephew quarreled and were fined.)

⁵² *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵³ Malcolm, *Memoir of Central India*, I: 574, footnote; ‘Jawos’ is probably a derivation of the Turkic ‘chaoush’.

These records still relate only to households wealthy enough to enter the central archive. But a far larger number attracted the attention of the great insofar as their domestic broils were an important fiscal resource for the patrimonial state and the petty office holders who had a share in it. Many were probably quietly settled by the extortion of a few rupees or a small gift in kind. How far this could reach is evidenced by a dispute in a family of leather workers remote from the royal court. Thus one Phakirā, a leather worker from Vasai, near Bombay, had in 1748 to travel to the court in Pune to tell his story to the Peśvā and secure redress. Phakirā's father-in-law Padyā, a tanner, had no son, but some property. Before his death, he gave part to his brother and the rest to his daughter and son-in-law. This happened before the Maratha conquest of the region in 1739. After Maratha power had been established, Phakirā's affines went and complained to the district governor, who seized all his property. The Peśvā ordered that half the property should be escheated to the state and half be returned to the unfortunate Phakirā.⁵⁴ Specific disputes could be allotted to specific persons, who would then milk the disputants. John Malcom's *Memoir* reproduces a conversation that he had with an emissary from the Gwalior court regarding such an allotment to the son of a former provincial governor. Malcom's assistance was sought because "this *Tunta Punta* [dispute] has been given to Jeswunt Rao's son, and beyond such jobs he has only one poor village to subsist himself and adherents."⁵⁵

Even if the case did not involve a property that would interest the royal court, petty officials would be alert to the fees that they might secure. One Lacchi Bhoi, by profession a palanquin bearer, abandoned his wife, who went and complained to the head of the city police in Pune. The latter directed the caste to appoint a panel of arbitrators (*pancāyat*) and the panel reconciled the couple, but the official then began to demand a bribe from Lacchi. The latter may have served some influential person who interceded for him; at any rate the official was ordered to desist.⁵⁶ The personal accounts of individual officials routinely record such income. Thus the district officer of Supe, near Pune, recorded in 1722–1723:⁵⁷

7 (rupees) Rayājī Katka resident of village Murṭi beat his nephew who came and complained so process fee

⁵⁴ SSRPD Part 2 vol. 2, 3.

⁵⁵ Malcom, *Memoir of Central India*, I: 573–575, footnote.

⁵⁶ Bhois were by profession bearers of palanquins. SSRPD Part 8 vol. 3, 257.

⁵⁷ Maharashtra State Archives, Pune, Parasnis transcripts, vol. 14 fo. 77.

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|--------------|---|
| 5 (rupees) | Mulānā of village Sirsophala was alleged to have beaten his wife, so he was brought in for enquiry but the allegation proved false; still mulcted |
| 475 (rupees) | Mahimājī headman of village Karaṭi—his daughter-in-law committed suicide—so he was fined |

Another official's accounts from 1778 confirm the routine nature of the practice.⁵⁸

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 50 rupees | Hasankhān of Nevasā had promised to marry his daughter to Rājekhān of Rāmhod but a quarrel broke out which was settled for a fee of 100 rupees (but) cash received (only 50) |
| 400 rupees | Pune district Motirām Gujar of Peṭh Guruvār engaged in sexual misconduct with the wife of a Tāmboli, so cash fine |

From northwestern Maharashtra.⁵⁹

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 8 rupees | [realized from] women of the Māli community who quarreled with each other |
|----------|---|

When two sons—one first-born by a secondary marriage and the other second-born to a regularly wedded wife—contended over their father's property, the successful claimant paid the government 1,200 rupees.⁶⁰

Narendra Wagle's careful study of the Pune police commissioner (*kotwāl*) papers also shows the extent to which greedy local officials watched for family and other quarrels to yield sources of profit. All sorts of disputes and accusations were grist to the mill.⁶¹ Wagle discusses these cases in terms of a tripartite interaction between the authority of the individual, the *jāti* and the government, but we must remember that the *kotwāl* was himself as much a fiscal as a police official, and his office yielded both him and the government a significant revenue. A jurisdiction dispute in west-central Gujarat led to the production of a series of accounts showing

⁵⁸ N.G. Chapekar, *Peśvāicya Sāvlit* (Pune: BISM, 1938), 101–104.

⁵⁹ *MIS* vol. 23: *Bhambhorkar Bhosle Daphtar* (Dhule: Rajavade Samshodhana Mandala, 1946), 81.

⁶⁰ SSRPD 7, 2, p. 182.

⁶¹ Narendra K. Wagle, "The Government, the *Jāti* and the Individual: Rights, Discipline and Control in the Pune Kotwal Papers, 1766–1794," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (n.s.) 34, 3 (2000): 321–360.

that the claimant had collected various fines over the period 1811–1826. So for instance, Patel Saljee Govind engaged in “criminal intercourse” with the wife of another Patel and paid 35 rupees; but another such culprit was mulcted 80 rupees; the wife of Koonbee Karia Triyum threw her child into a well—the husband was mulcted 35 rupees, and so on.⁶² This and much other evidence bears out John Malcolm’s observation that domestic fines were a significant source of government revenue. “Adultery, second marriages, broils and all forms of irregularity are subject to these fines From the comparative facility of concealment, such fines have often been the perquisites of collectors.”⁶³ As a result this milieu, great and small alike had to seek to manage their personal and domestic affairs so as not to attract the intervention of external authority, which could prove humiliating and expensive, if not ruinous.

This leads on to an important point: this conjunction of fiscality and legality meant that the powerful could actually be continually shaping, if not producing, the familial structures of their subalterns through the pressure of this disciplinary-fiscal structure. So the subaltern did not enjoy autonomy in even this “inner” sphere, and indeed, like the tanner Phakirā’s in-laws, did not scruple to invoke elite Brahmanical authority in the pursuit of familial disputes. This persisted unbroken under colonial administration too.⁶⁴ The records of the presidencies of Bombay and Madras are full of such cases.⁶⁵ A convenient overview of the situation is provided in the irate response of the Mayor’s Court in Bombay in 1730 to a reprimand from the President and Council at Surat for interfering in “Religious matters”. They retorted that property disputes and caste were intimately connected and settling property disputes had always required inquiry into what the Surat Council now termed religious matters. This, they added was also routine in the other English settlements:

we must observe that we are well assured Disputes and Differences between the Casts at Madras and Bengale are always understood to come under the

⁶² *Historical Sketch of the Native States under the control of the Political Agent in the Rewa Kanta*, Selection from the Records of the Government of Bombay no. 23 new series (Bombay: Education Society Press, 1854), 250–253, orthography original.

⁶³ Malcolm, *Memoir* II: 53–55; in 1730 Mr. Draper, previous Mayor of Bombay, was asked for an account of the unrecorded ‘Commission’ that he had charged litigants when cases were heard at his house. No account could be produced. OIOC, BJP 416/103, hearings of 7 and 28 January and 11 February 1729/30.

⁶⁴ See L.T. Kikani, *Caste in the Courts* (Rajkot: Ganatra Printing Works, 1912), for evidence from across British India.

⁶⁵ See for example, the legal records in the IOR, P/416/99, British Library.

denomination of Civill Cases and are accordingly taken cognizance of the by the Mayor's Court there ...⁶⁶

Colonial and Postcolonial Families

By the late eighteenth century, the early colonial administration was not merely drawn into local disputes; it was also deeply involved in the micro-management of the familial lives of its personnel. It carefully managed the reproduction of European soldiers and sought to prevent the formation a part-European settler class, in the same way as it sought to limit the numbers and control the conduct of private Europeans in India. The value of this strategy was made obvious when Governor-General John Shore was faced with a mutiny among the East Company Army's European officers in 1795–1796. Reflecting on the episode a year or so later, Shore's successor in office, Richard Wellesley, wrote that:

If Europeans had been settled with their families in India; or if these men had, or could have had, their homes in that country, the Company would have lost it, and nothing could ever have regained it.⁶⁷

It was from awareness of this danger that, as Indrani Chatterjee has shown, the Company assiduously sought to limit the development a local power elite with any genealogical depth. This was intended to preempt any consequent claim to the “rights of Englishmen” that had just been forcefully raised in North America. The offspring of mixed European and Indian parentage therefore formed a socially inferior class of Eurasians, excluded from power. As early as 1786, the Company forbade the progeny of native women from traveling to England, after discovering that the Indian-born John Turing, “dark as his mother,” had done so and secured a cadet's appointment in the Army.⁶⁸ Two decades later, a “mulatto” candidate secured an appointment

⁶⁶ P/416/103, July 1, 1730. Orthography original. This was correct: as is shown by a Minute on the administration of justice in Madras, prepared by B. Sullivan, 4th July 1783, in OIOC, Home Misc. vol. 11/372. This view is also supported by extensive research by Niels Brimnes in the Danish and English archive of the Madras region. Niels Brimnes, *Constructing the Colonial Encounter: Right and Left Hand Castes in Early Colonial South India* (Richmond Surrey: The Curzon Press, 1999).

⁶⁷ Sidney J. Owen, *A Selection from the Despatches, Treaties, and Other Papers of the Marquess Wellesley, K.G., during His Government of India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1877), 775–776. The memorandum is undated but probably written in 1797 or 1798.

⁶⁸ Indrani Chatterjee, “Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans in Early Colonial India”, in *Subaltern Studies X*, Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash and Susie

only by paying a young Englishman to impersonate him at the interview. Although the disavowed progeny were excluded from the covenanted service, some Eurasians found jobs in other state employment into the 1830s. But the official policies toward them derived from a well-established, generalized contempt for those of mixed descent.⁶⁹ As early as 1786, the surgeon Richard Wilson, in proposing the creation of a charity school to raise such children as loyal Protestants, remarked that it “hath long been a severe and unanswerable Reproach from the Natives of this Country that Britons, above all other Nations, have neglected and despised their progeny.”⁷⁰

If, despite such attitudes, the efforts at social integration had succeeded, British India might have developed into a *casta*-ranked society on the Iberian model. But the need to win the support of the native Indian clerical classes, as well as the fear of promoting a Creole elite like the treacherous Americans, led the East India Company onto a different track. In the last decades of its rule, before the revolt of 1857, Eurasian clerks were gradually displaced in state service by Indians from the traditional clerical classes, both Hindu and Muslim (and around Bombay, also Parsi and Goan). A greater regard by the British for their own “blood” returned after 1857, when Anglo-Indians were extensively recruited into the developing railway system in order to ensure imperial control of this strategic asset.⁷¹ Eurasians, however, could not compete with the indigenous clerical classes in subordinate employment, that is, clerical work.

The government saw the logic of Wellesley’s argument against allowing Europeans to set down familial roots within India, and sought to ensure that the affective ties and personal aspirations of key cadres such as Covenanted Service and Army officers should be directed toward England. The disciplinary value of this policy for the East India Company’s government is

Tharu, eds. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49–97. Turing’s case is 86 and note 135. The impersonation case is cited in C. Northcote Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 371. The candidate was a “mulatto, not eligible for any such post.”

⁶⁹ Emily Eden, *Up the Country: Letters Written to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* with an introduction by Elizabeth Claridge and notes by Edward Thompson (London: Virago, 1983), 140. She wrote of the prevailing contempt for the lower, uncovenanted civil service: “as many of them are half-castes, we with our pure Saxon or Norman blood, cannot really think contemptuously enough of them” (140).

⁷⁰ Henry D. Love, ed., *Vestiges of Old Madras* reprint 3 vols. (New York: AMS, 1968).

⁷¹ Laura Bear, *Lines of the Nation: Indian Railway Workers, Bureaucracy and the Intimate Historical Self* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) has an extensive discussion of the “railway caste”. See also Wavell’s note in Penderel Moon, ed., *Wavell: The Viceroy’s Journal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 210.

shown by Sleeman's dedication to his *Rambles and Recollections* (1844), where he wrote of how nine out of ten Englishmen in India found their greatest pleasure in letters from their sisters at home, which filled

the landscapes so dear to our recollections, with ever varying groups of the family circles, among whom our infancy and our boyhood have been passed; and among whom we still hope to spend the winter of our days.

He added that the approbation of the circles represented in these letters was an important restraint on Englishmen in India, and so the sisters should be considered "a valuable species of *unpaid* magistracy to the Government of India."⁷² The psychic isolation of young men well indoctrinated in this system was described by Emily Eden as "horrible solitude" that produced depression. One such officer told her of "the horror of being three months without seeing an European, or hearing an English word ..."⁷³ Indirectly, therefore, we may see patterns of marriage and family formation being managed even by the British imperial regime to bolster key elements of its governing apparatus. The political and military efficacy of that apparatus depended on constant policing of the boundaries of ethnicity.

Furthermore, as Indrani Chatterjee has shown, the colonial state was, well into the twentieth century, deeply involved in the adjudicatory politics of filiation and adoption among gentry and rulers, with very much the same motives as its Indian predecessors. The doctrine of lapse by which a number of important princely states were annexed in the 1840s and 1850s turned crucially on the definition of 'legitimate heir' as deployed by the Government of India. It was therefore deeply involved in the regulation of marriage, legitimacy, and descent among its more important subjects, such as princes and large landowners. This was especially true where British pensions had to be disbursed to titular rulers, but extended beyond via the famous 'doctrine of lapse'.⁷⁴ But the latter policy was thought to have contributed to the great revolt of 1857 and was officially abandoned by the Queen's Government in 1858. The direct fiscal fruits of family broils as such were also officially abandoned by the British colonial regime as it formalized legal codes in the nineteenth century. Revenue from litigation around these mat-

⁷² William H. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official* (Delhi: AES reprint of 1893 edition, 1995), viii. Emphasis added.

⁷³ Emily Eden, *Up the Country: Letters to Her Sister from the Upper Provinces of India* with an introduction by Elizabeth Claridge and notes by Edward Thompson, 77.

⁷⁴ Sylvia Vatuk, "Family as a Contested Concept in Early Nineteenth Century Madras," in *Unfamiliar Relations: Family and History in South Asia*, Indrani Chatterjee, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 161–191.

ters now came indirectly by way of judicial stamps and other fees paid by all who resorted to the courts. Windfall profits were left to lawyers—who, ironically were often prominent critics of colonial rule. Only the family strategies of the turbulent classes—like the Rajputs of the Gangetic plain among whom, Malavika Kasturi has argued, female infanticide was investigated as part of the program of rural pacification launched after the revolt of 1857.⁷⁵ But the new judicial sphere irretrievably began to change the internal life of even the great households that clung to an imagined kingly past, like the Velama lordships of coastal Andhra.⁷⁶ Finally, of course, there was both effective and ineffective legislation directed at the population as large, whose practices were in any case now being reshaped by socio-economic change and the slow sedimentation of litigation in the colonial legal system. Parallel to this and equally compelling was the stream of missionary polemic on gender relations among both Hindus and Muslims. Defensive responses to it included the well-documented ‘social reform’ movements across the sub-continent in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Less recognized is that the non-Brahman movement in both western and southern India included critiques of the upper-caste norms of kin and family that were infiltrating the rest of the community.⁷⁷ Elsewhere, as Kothari has observed, a changing sociopolitical situation led to changes in marital strategy, with hypergamy being replaced by mutuality as formerly privileged strata lost power under colonial rule.⁷⁸ Alice W. Clark has shown how different social groups adopted varying marriage strategies that, over decades, affected relative socio-economic status. This was why the rising landed and mercantile caste of Patidars restricted sexual and reproductive behavior as group and controlled marriage among men of property. “Their doing so enhanced their status and power as managers, in an agrarian system that required vigilant and continued management.”⁷⁹

Thus, issues of family law and inheritance have been politicized from the beginning. Hindu neo-orthodox opposition to the Age of Consent Bill in 1892 did much to energize and mobilize the so-called Extremist strain of

⁷⁵ Kasturi, *Embattled Identities*, 229–238.

⁷⁶ Pamela Price, “Kin, Clan and Power in Colonial South India,” 192–221.

⁷⁷ Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-century Western India*, 72–87 and *passim*; Sreenivas, *Wives, Widows, Concubines*, 67–77, for southern India; Pinch, *Peasants and Monks*, 117–119, for north India.

⁷⁸ Kothari, “Introduction,” 9–11.

⁷⁹ Alice W. Clark, “Limitations on Female Life Chances in Rural Central Gujarat,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 20, (1983): 22.

the Indian National Congress.⁸⁰ In Chapter 6, I will show that the province of Panjab was to be the decisive political arena for the twentieth-century history of the Indian subcontinent. A path-breaking study by Anshu Malhotra shows how three major faiths and a multitude of 'castes' (*zāt*) contested its political terrain in the last century of colonial rule. The urban middle classes sought to hold on to their economic niche in the governing apparatus as they felt beleaguered by growing British patronage of affluent Muslims and agrarian Jats. The management of female sexuality was the hallmark of status. So men seeking to buttress their status devoted substantial energy to reorganizing women's lives, public deportment and relations with other castes and classes. This prescribed and to a degree implemented new codes of domesticity under the guise of a purified tradition.⁸¹ A bowdlerized version of the *Manusmṛti*, a classical Sanskrit code for Brahmans became "a primer for embourgeoisement and class management."⁸² By the 1920s, elected provincial legislatures had gained some power and nationalist politicians were forced to address questions such as the age of consent and minimum age at marriage. This was especially the case after the international furor roused by Katherine Mayo's *Mother India*.⁸³ That nationalist predicament led to the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 which fixed fourteen as minimum age at marriage for girls and eighteen for boys.⁸⁴ A steady trickle of legislative enactments gradually impinged on household membership, inheritance etc. Laws for Hindus (and Sikhs and Jains) were seriously overhauled in 1956 by the Hindu Code. Personal law and political identity continued as political flashpoints in subsequent decades.⁸⁵ There was fierce opposition to the Hindu Code passed by the Government of India in 1956 and more recently conflicts around the Shah Bano decision of the Indian Supreme Court in 1986. At the time of writing (2012), the regional community organizations of a dominant community—the Jat peasants of northern India—are locked in

⁸⁰ This is the subject of an outstanding paper by Tanika Sarkar, "A Pre-History of Rights? The Age of Consent Debates in Colonial Bengal" in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

⁸¹ Anshu Malhotra, *Gender, Caste and Religious Identities: Restructuring Class in Colonial Punjab* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2–7 and 116–123.

⁸² Kumkum Sangari, "The 'Amenities of Domestic Life' Questions on Labour" quoted in Malhotra, *ibid.* n. 4, p. 117.

⁸³ See Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 141–170.

⁸⁴ Philips ed., *Evolution of India and Pakistan*, 759–762.

⁸⁵ See Robert D. Baird, ed., *Religion and Law in Independent India* 2nd revised ed. (Delhi: Manohar, 2005), especially articles by Baird, Gregory C. Kozlowski, Kavita R. Khory, N. Gerald Barrier, Vasudha Dhagamwar and John H. Mansfield.

conflict with the legal system of the Republic over clan elders' power to regulate marriage, a right that these elders hitherto enforced by the ostracism (and occasional murder) of offenders.⁸⁶

Thus we may see that like other social institutions, the household was also imbricated in power relations that extended up to the apex of political power. Great households were re-made and caste boundaries re-shaped by these needs. Even among lesser folk, the policing of the family could benefit the state both by generating allegiance and windfall revenue. The English colonial government early used similar strategies of subversion and annexation. It also armored itself against the seduction of its key personnel by actively promoting the formation of a new, Anglocentric ethnicity. To do so, it consciously manipulated kinship and inheritance to create an ethnic identity—that of the English-born, whose sense of self-hood was to be a crucial bulwark of empire. Subject populations countered with their own versions of tradition. Socio-economic change subtly and continually changed the household—which is still, of course, the fundamental unit of property inheritance and social reproduction. Postcolonial states in contemporary South Asia have, of course, a rich history of familial succession and familial strife, in the worlds of both business and high politics.⁸⁷ If, as Trautmann perceived, the state made use of the kin system, the kin network has also organized itself to control the state. But though it has increasingly broken away from the overt norm of endogamy, it remains a major strand in “the networks of relationships that enter into the political process”.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ “Support for Khap Panchayats Swells,” *The Hindu*, accessed May 10, 2010 <http://beta.thehindu.com/news/national/article426497.ece>; see Prem Chowdhury, “Caste Panchayats and the Policing of Marriage in Haryana: Enforcing Kinship and Territorial Exogamy,” in *Caste in Question*, Dipankar Gupta ed., 1–42; also Chowdhury, *Contentious Marriages, Eloping Couples: Gender Caste and Patriarchy in Northern India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), for careful studies of the region, past and present.

⁸⁷ The Nehru-Gandhi cousins—Rahul and Varun; the Ambani brothers, the Mahajan brothers, the Bhuttos and the numerous sons, daughters and widows claiming power at all levels adequately illustrate this.

⁸⁸ Kothari, “Introduction”, 7.

CHAPTER FIVE

RULING, IDENTIFYING, AND COUNTING: KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY INDIA

Legibility is a condition of manipulation. Any substantial state intervention in society ... requires the invention of units that are visible. Whatever the units being manipulated, they must be organized in a manner that permits them to be identified, observed, recorded, counted, aggregated and monitored.

– James C. Scott¹

The increasingly invasive centers of royal bureaucratic power that emerged in the early modern epoch both changed and were changed by the everyday boundaries of social life in the micro-region, the village, and the household, as we have seen in Chapters 2, 3, and 4. The effective generation and exercise of such bureaucratic power greatly depended on the institutionalization of knowledge. Bureaucracy cannot exist otherwise. Social knowledge, in turn, changes the subjects of knowledge: the process is a recursive one. Modern forms of bureaucratic knowledge had South Asian precursors in several regimes of the early modern era, but there can be little doubt that the colonial regime pursued its aim of collecting such information with unmatched persistence, tenacity, and success. In the process, it extensively deployed the new technology of printing, initially as a cheap way of disseminating information within its own apparatus and for demanding taskmasters in London.

The volume of print then increased massively after the metropolitan publics began to demand more monitoring and reporting in the aftermath of the unexpected revolt of 1857. But this information inevitably came to be shared with many within the subject populations across the empire. One component of the information gathering was the halting but irresistible rise of the uniform bureaucratic record of land rights or property claims. Another component was census enumeration. Counting people by classes had (as we shall see) long been known in South Asia: but the new, totalizing

¹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 183.

Census of India reports helped enlarge the arena of political competition, even as land measurement and tax records energized the land and credit markets. All this, in turn, set off unpredictable social and political processes that reshaped society and politics in radical ways. Neither social nor state agendas were limited to what could be achieved through instruments like the census.²

The issue of the relationship between knowledge and power was eloquently explored in the 1960s by Michel Foucault for early modern Europe. These ideas were soon deployed to understand European imperial regimes. Bernard Cohn had already proposed in 1970 that the British colonial census played an important part in South Asian identity formation—a hypothesis strengthened by the fact that this was an institution that every adult male would encounter during his lifetime.³ In the 1980s, Cohn and Nicholas Dirks further developed this insight for British India. They argued that colonialism was more than a system of power: it was also a mode of knowing that constructed its objects of knowledge.⁴ Extending this idea, in the 1991 edition of his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson added the census to the list of institutions that created the derivative nationalisms of the Third World.⁵ But these studies tended to see colonialism as the only institution having effective agency. It was viewed as emitting a flood of discourse that forever drowned antediluvian ‘traditional India.’

The first successful effort to move beyond this limited perspective and examine both autonomous networks of social communication within the subject population and the surveillance systems of the colonial state came with C.A. Bayly’s important 1996 book. He rightly pointed out that the precolonial state did not simply extract revenue from a society composed of

a harmonious mélange of syncretic cults and local cultures. Both as a revenue-extracting apparatus and as an accumulation of knowledge, the state in immediate pre-colonial India was more formidably developed than this suggests.⁶

² Nandini Sundar, “Caste as Census Category: Implications for Sociology,” *Current Sociology*, 48 (2000): 116–117.

³ Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” 224–254. To this day, census enumerators often seek information only from a male householder or household representative (personal experience).

⁴ Bernard Cohn and Nicholas Dirks, “Beyond the Fringe: The Nation State, Colonialism, and the Technologies of Power,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* vol. 1, No. 2 (1988): 224–229.

⁵ Benedict R.O. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 163–164.

⁶ C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication*

In separate papers published in 2003, Norbert Peabody and I both argued that social classification and enumeration were widely understood and practiced by Indian states well before the onset of colonial rule.⁷ This chapter develops that theme into the early colonial era and connects the domains of social knowledge and societal communication to the domains of fiscal and military power. An overview of the political consequences of these developments will be found in Chapter 6.

Power and Knowledge from Late Medieval to Colonial South Asia

In 1997, John Richards published an analytical survey of the major empires of the early modern world and suggested that they were all variants of a common model. Two features they shared were “new abilities to mobilize resources and deploy overwhelming force.”⁸ These twin capacities, in turn, depended on the construction of an apparatus for the routine generation and accumulation of information. Confronted with assertive and powerful neighbors or insurmountable physical barriers, emergent states had to move beyond the diplomatic and topographical knowledge needed for raiding and collecting tribute. They had to know how, when, and where to extract resources, and then how to husband them and use them to best effect. Heedless expenditures could drain away resources and lead to collapse as much as reckless adventures could. Early modern states thus wanted to know their resources, their subjects, and their adversaries.

As kingdoms became more stable, they were able to develop larger and more complex bureaucracies that, in turn, contributed to that stability. The opportunities offered by employment in these bureaucracies in turn attracted older literate groups, multiplied the numbers of those trained in the developing skills of accountancy and record keeping, and ensured that these operations could be carried out at a very low cost to the state, if not to its subjects. All this in turn enabled the new states to balance and control the turbulent men of the sword by means of an alternative elite of the pen. The

in India, 1780–1870 (Delhi: Cambridge University Press/ Foundation Books, 1999), 368. First published 1996.

⁷ Norbert Peabody, “Cents, Sense, Census: Human Inventories in Late Precolonial and Early Colonial India,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43 (2001): 819–850; Sumit Guha, “The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India, c. 1600–1990,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 45, 2 (2003): 148–167.

⁸ John F. Richards, “Early Modern India and World History,” *Journal of World History* 8 (1997): 201.

cash economy made the deployment of both classes possible on a massively enlarged scale, with the ruler (ideally speaking) poised above both. Money, the universal numeraire, came early to India.

So efforts at reading the complex landscape of north India in monetary terms were clearly being made even before the overthrow of the Lodi monarchs by the Timurid emperor Babur in 1526. His memoir gives estimates of the tax yield of Sultan Ibrahim's north Indian territories in monetary terms—reckoned with spurious precision down to the fractions of a copper *tanka*. He also had a rule of thumb to convert money into manpower: every thousand *tankas* would support one horseman.⁹ These numbers must have originated in the financial office of the previous administration. After Babur's death, his son Humayun reigned briefly before being displaced by Sher Shah (1540–1545), a magnate of obscure origins who, however, shared many of the ambitions of the monarchs of his epoch. Going beyond rough estimates, Sher Shah reportedly sought to base his tax demands on an actual estimate of the gross output. The estimate was made, it seems, by the naïve device of assuming that all cultivated land fell into three classes, and that averaging the yield of each would result in a true estimate of the average output. The Mughal emperor Akbar developed this model into a set of “yield rates” to which reportedly current prices were applied to generate the tax demand. The leading historian of Mughal India, Irfan Habib, writes that one “can only regard them as essentially paper rates.” Nonetheless, efforts at bringing them closer to reality continued with more and more detailed attention to differentiating estimates by region and crop.¹⁰

As the struggle for inclusiveness and accuracy continued, the intermediary clerks who were supposed to ensure it were themselves suspected of concealing the real situation. Thus when Akbar's experiment of dividing the kingdom into units yielding exactly 250,000 rupees (one *karor dām-s*) each failed, it was assumed that the officials in charge had concealed information to their own profit. Many were arrested, and “many good men died from the severe beatings which were administered and from tortures of the rack and pincers.” Some of those arrested in the early 1580s were still in prison in 1594.¹¹ Such use of enhanced interrogation techniques indicates that the state had not achieved the inclusiveness and accuracy that it sought, or

⁹ Wheeler M. Thackston, translated, edited and annotated, *The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 355–356.

¹⁰ Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System*, 1999 ed. 242–244.

¹¹ Iqtidar Alam Khan, “The Middle Classes in the Mughal Empire,” Presidential address, PIHC 36th Session 1975 (Delhi: Published by the Indian History Congress, 1976), 125.

there would have been no suspicion that funds were being diverted into other pockets.¹² Ultimately it is likely that the Mughal government, like the East India Company two centuries later, extracted taxes through a range of devices, while always seeing a vision of unmeasured—and uncollected—wealth floating before it like the fabled city of El Dorado. But the search continued unrelenting. The pursuit of information was an integral part of the maintenance of power and control well before the colonial state.

Creating the Information Apparatus

The struggle to know, to measure, and to extort was indeed never-ending, as were the various devices of concealment and evasion. Neither rack nor pincers could make officials supply information that they did not have. Central authorities slowly came to realize this, and sought to establish local sources of knowledge, initially at the subdivisinal (*pargana*) level. These would be men like one Bhagadcuri, who appears in a compilation of the historical legends of the northern Konkan, the seventeenth-century *Mahikāvāṭicī bakhar*. It discusses the Muslim conquest of the region led by one Nikā Malik. When he defeated and killed the previous king of the Konkan,

Bhagadcuri, son of Jaitcuri, was the first to go and submit to him. Bhagadcuri informed Nikā Malik about the territory. He described the *mahals*, parganas, divisions, villages. He explained the tax-contracts (*hawale*), [income from] fines, extra expenditures. He explained it all to Nika Malik. Pleased at this Nika Malik conferred the post of head courtier on Bhagadcuri.¹³

Administrative practice based on such beginnings is described in the fourteenth-century narrative of Ibn Battuta, which tells us that at least in the well-governed portion of the Delhi Sultanate, every group of a hundred villages had a headman and an accountant-treasurer.¹⁴ Similar officers existed on the west coast.¹⁵ Record keepers could, of course serve their own interests

¹² Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Middle Classes in the Mughal Empire," 124–125. Khan adds "The evidence on this point is literally unending, and it is full of sickening details of torture perpetrated against the persons of the officials and their families." 124.

¹³ Rajwade, ed., *Mahikāvāṭicī uṛf Māhīmācī bakhar* [1924] reprint (Pune: Varada Books, 1999), 45–46.

¹⁴ H.A.R. Gibb, translated with revision and notes, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta A.D. 1325–1354* 4 vols. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1999), III: 741.

¹⁵ In some areas, the village accountant was established early. So for example, he is a recognized functionary in the 1526 *foral* of Old Goa, which document however declares that

rather than those of their masters. So the Mughal emperors continued the binary structures of authority described by Ibn Battuta and extended them to the provincial level, with the provincial governor checked by the Diwān (chief fiscal officer), and vice versa.¹⁶ Likewise, C.A. Elliott wrote of Unnao district of present-day UP (and Mughal India generally) that the record keeper (*qānungo/canoongoe*) and chief of the gentry (*caudhuri*) were selected to balance each other: the former appointment was always given to a Kaith (a scribal Hindu caste) and the latter held by the chief *zamindar* or lord of the pargana.

[But in] the course of time the Canoongoes however, taking advantage of their opportunities for frightening or cajoling the villagers, and supported by the Amil's [tax-collector's] influence, managed to become landholders themselves, and thus they broke down the separation which had existed between them and the Chowdries. The latter at the same time, not being bred to the study of accounts as the Canoongoes were ... gradually dropped their attendance at the Amil's court, and left the Canoongoes in undisputed authority.¹⁷

A central concern of every state builder remained the centralization of resources via taxation, and additional elements of supervision and audit were added as time passed and evasions multiplied. Taxation, that is, the centralization of resources, had both a fiscal and military dimension. Locally retained surpluses—resources not transferred to the central power—indicated a failure of control over the subject population and provided regional chiefs with the sinews of war. This logic was described by the experienced Maratha minister Kṛṣṇājī Anant Sabhāsad in the 1690s:

in villages where the hereditary chiefs (*mīrās-dārs*) collected one or two thousands, they paid only two or three hundred as a lump sum assessment. As a result the chiefs grew rich and built mansions, towers and forts in the villages, posted infantry and musketeers in them and grew powerful. They would not wait on the revenue officers, and if the latter suggested an increase in the revenue, the chiefs became belligerent and prepared to fight. In this way they turned refractory and forcibly took control of the country.¹⁸

he was appointed by the peasant proprietors and subordinate to them. See Baden-Powell, "The Villages of Goa in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (April 1900): 264. The office had either not existed or had decayed by Shivaji's time in other parts of the west coast.

¹⁶ Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration* (London: Luzac and Co., 1920), 86–87.

¹⁷ Charles A. Elliott, *The Chronicles of Oonao, a District in Oudh* (Allahabad: Mission Press, 1862), 112–113.

¹⁸ Bhimrav Kulkarni, ed., *Kṛṣṇājī Anant Sabhāsad viracit Chatrapati Śrīśivājī Mahārājānce Ādya caritra* (Pune: Anmol Prakashan, 1987), 25–26.

As political competition intensified, aspirant potentates realized that measurement and recording were fundamental to the effort to bring alternative centers of power to heel. This general rationale was enunciated by the Maratha founder-king Shivaji as early as 1656 when appointing village accountants in the coastal region. Reprimanding the local officers, he declared that without adequate statistical information, “peasants will be ruined, the province desolate; therefore with due regard to its prosperity, accountants should be appointed in every group of settlements.”¹⁹ Likewise, the emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707) instructed accountants to assess individual peasants and examine their capacity or incapacity to cultivate additional land—a process that would be impossible without permanent village accountants with a close knowledge of each taxpayer.²⁰

Thus the need to measure and record was felt across the subcontinent by regimes great and small, and smaller regimes under energetic rulers were able to achieve a new level of penetration. The Khurda Raj was founded by a local landholder under Mughal rule in Orissa and took to the new methods and records. A painstaking study by Akio Tanabe shows how the penetration of the king’s authority in the region was achieved through the “introduction of numeration, accounting, and recording of entitlements: that is, technology of the state’s surveillance over the local resources.”²¹ Numerous surviving documents from Shivaji’s successors in western India attest to the fact that he was able to enforce his rules, at least in some parts of kingdom. But he was the energetic new ruler of a relatively small realm. His successors to the throne found that winning and retaining the loyalty of local chiefs and headmen demanded a retreat from such rigor. Many of the old arrangements denounced by Sabhāsad, whereby hereditary chiefs retained most of the revenue collected soon revived. Record keeping, meanwhile, provided an occupational niche for the lower literati—and one that afforded both authority and money. The posts therefore continued, though the holders were usually more concerned with following local authority rather than central regulations. The struggle over information was unending. Local record

¹⁹ Govind S. Sardesai, ed., *Selections from the Peshwa Daftar* 46 vols. (Bombay Government Press, 1931–1935). Henceforth cited as SPD; vol. 31: 20–22.

²⁰ Translated Jadunath Sarkar as “The Revenue Regulations of Aurangzib,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* II, no. 6 (June 1906): 223–238. Of course, it is unlikely that this happened with any frequency.

²¹ Akio Tanabe, “Early Modernity and Colonial Transformation: Rethinking the Role of the King in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Orissa, India,” in *The State in India: Past and Present*, Masaaki Kimura and Akio Tanabe, eds. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 210.

keepers became adept at pretending compliance and practicing concealment. Imperial instructions often required officials to base tax administration on actual individual collections. But officials would have depended ultimately on individual information compiled by village accountants, in local language records that Persianate officialdom could not read even if they had been able to secure all of them. Iqtidar Alam Khan comments:

Taking advantage of the difficulty that a higher noble or for that matter even an average official of the central or provincial *diwani* [fiscal office] would have in identifying and understanding village records properly, the *qanungo*, the record-keeper at the *pargana* level, in collaboration with *patwari* [village accountant] would often fake village records with the aim of covering up defalcation of revenue collections.²²

Not surprisingly, the early British survey officers found that in north India, village record keepers had become dependent allies of local landlords, and the quality of their records was dubious. In some areas, patwaris simply did not exist: so even though the Mughal governor of Bengal had his seat at Dhaka, none of the districts in that Division had village accountants, so that there would be little check on what landlords and *qānungos* chose to report.²³ The early British government was equipped with new technologies of measurement and record as well as a persistence and power far exceeding any predecessor. Nonetheless, the actual state of things on the ground could be concealed for decades on end. So the first scientific surveyor of a British Indian district found after twenty years of British rule that the first English administrator (1818–1823) had ordered a measurement of each cultivator's lands and a tax assessment based on the crops grown. This was impossible to implement.

Consequent on this order, the Camavisdar [local officer] and some Hoozoor Carcoons [district office clerks] professed to prepare by actual measurement returns exhibiting the extent of land cultivated, and description of crops produced by each individual cultivator in the Dang villages, and the Jumma-bundee [land tax] settlement was framed accordingly. But the Collector was grossly deceived if he thought he had succeeded in thus summarily introducing his ill-conceived plan, for with the connivance of the hereditary and stipendiary officers, the ryots [peasants] continued the Turrufbundee, [fixed fractional shares] or other such system as might have obtained in their village when we took the country, and the Ryotwar [individual farm] statements recorded by the Collector were so much waste paper.²⁴

²² Khan, "The Middle Classes in Mughal India," 120–122.

²³ Jack, *Faridpur Settlement Report*, 51.

²⁴ Report by H.E. Goldsmid, 11 October 1841 in "Report on the Experimental Revenue Set-

Several years later, another British officer had had one village measured. Only the cultivated lands were measured, but even so the total

exceeded what had hitherto been entered as covering both cultivated and waste [uncultivated]. It was therefore deemed expedient to draw up the records, so as to make it appear as if there were no waste land whatever left in the village.²⁵

This, in fact, highlights the deficiency of all surveys until the great trigonometrical survey of India was completed in the mid-nineteenth century—there was no way of checking if the aggregate measurements in fact exhaustively covered the entire geographical surface. This and other discrepancies were evident when documents were scrutinized. So after a close examination of another error-ridden set of survey and assessment records from north India, the measured judgment of the governor general of India was that “nothing could be more fallacious or mischievous than to rely on documents summarily prepared by the Native officers, and hastily revised by the [English] collectors.”²⁶

Both for the British and preceding regimes however, the discovery of such errors only fueled the drive to collect information. This was relentless, and although the quality of information might vary, we do find an increasing volume of facts, factoids, and fabrications being accumulated. C.A. Elliott, who governed an Awadh district immediately after its annexation, observed that Mughal administrative checks had been nothing more than having a few village accounts translated to detect misdeeds. That procedure presumed that the village accounts would in fact contain entries showing frauds, extortions, and bribes. He wrote that the

simplicity of the methods here suggested for checking extortion on the part of Amils [officers of the fisc], shows how seldom such checks were put in force. In the settled provinces where we do look into the revenue accounts [i.e., village records], they would be the last places in which to find any bribe given to a Tehseeldar [tax-collector] or any sums extorted by the Police. Oudh is still unsophisticated, and such entries may occasionally be found in the village papers there.²⁷

tlement of Certain villages in the Broken and Hilly Country Forming the Kownaee Talooka of the Nassick Sub-Collectorate,” in *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bombay (Old Series)* VI, 10–11.

²⁵ Ibid., 52.

²⁶ *Selections from the Revenue Records of the North-Western Provinces 1822–1833* (Allahabad: Government of the N-W P, 1872), 70–71.

²⁷ Elliot, *Chronicles of Oonao*, 108–109, note. ‘Settled provinces’ were those that had been under British rule for several decades. Awadh had just been brought under British administration when Elliott wrote.

Viewed against this background, C.A. Elliott clearly shared his colleague H.M. Elliot's pride in the great survey and settlement operations of his period as a mark of the superior efficiency of the colonial administration that he served.²⁸

Decades of pressure certainly resulted in the generation of significant bodies of impersonal information by the British rulers, especially in the areas where government appointees directly collected taxes from village lords or small-holders. Officials were required to spend the winter and spring touring season "in camp," visiting as many villages as possible. In the Bombay Presidency, for instance, the annual reports required from each district began to include statistical returns of number of villages visited and individual tax-account books (*khātās*) verified. There are records of officers being chided by the Divisional Commissioner for deficiency in that regard.²⁹ Indian subordinates might be summarily dismissed or prosecuted if any irregularities were found.³⁰ But this very largely related to land measurement and taxation, where government income was at stake. Other information remained incomplete. So, for example, in 1880 the *Report of the Famine Commission* scathingly criticized the Government of India's inability to provide reliable all-India data on area and output of crops.³¹ Successful statecraft and stable tax-collection needed more than mere knowledge of land area and farm production, however. They needed knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of social groups, as well.

Political Knowledge and Ethnic Identity

Beyond the overt needs of the state treasury, there had long been the need to know and manage local chiefs, clans, and communities even in relatively peaceable areas covered by the standard administrative system of Mughal

²⁸ H.M. Elliot, cited in C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 228; John Strachey, *India* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench & Co., 1888), 241–242.

²⁹ For example, A.F. Woodburn, Acting Second Asst. Collector to Collector, Khandesh district: Annual Administrative Report for 1878–1879, 5 July 1879: para. 31 in Revenue Department vol. 20 of 1879, wrote that he tested the records in 28 villages. These manuscript reports are to be found in the Revenue Department records, Mumbai Archives of the government of Maharashtra, organized by district and year. Similar checks were introduced across most of British India as land surveys progressed.

³⁰ For examples, see Mumbai Archives Compilation no. 61, 'Dismissals' in Revenue Department, Volume 83 of 1892.

³¹ For a discussion of these problems down to 1947, see Sumit Guha, ed., *Agricultural Productivity in British India: Growth, Stagnation or Decline?* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1–48.

India. An early eighteenth-century administrative manual translated by Jadunath Sarkar advised every newly appointed provincial governor to send advance messengers with orders to

assemble the well-informed local men and learn from them the character of every zamindar and *jama'dar* of the place, and to report to you their mutual relations and their conduct towards former *subahdars* [governors] as regards the payment of revenue and how much a particular zamindar used to pay over and above the revenue.³²

So the incoming governor had to discover the individual character and disposition of both landlords and chiefs with armed followings (*jama'dar*). Once again we are back to the essential sinews of states—money and force. Akbar (r. 1556–1605) seems to have made the first attempt to systematize and aggregate this political knowledge in the “Account of the Twelve Provinces,” where the communities, *aqwām* (pl. of *qaum*), of the gentry were listed for the geographical subdivisions of the empire. This in turn reflected the fact that dominant local lords would depend in great measure on the support of their ethnic group. Significantly enough, estimates of their military resources were also made. The numbers of horsemen, infantry, and sometimes guns and boats that they mustered are then listed. This perception of the importance of ethnic connections and strengths persisted in later times. Ethnic classification of powerful landed gentry was most obviously relevant to political calculation—an indicator of the potential breadth of marital alliances and clan mobilization, one of the most solid forms of political engagement. This was easily understood in the seventeenth century, as we can see from a (probably apocryphal) story narrated in Sabhāsad’s history of the Maratha ruler Shivaji. Besieged by Aurangzeb’s generals Jai Singh and Diler Khan, Shivaji decided to come to terms and, fearing treachery by the Khan, first approached Jai Singh. The Maratha history represents Jai Singh as saying “I am a Rājput. You and I are of the same *jāti*. My head will have to be struck off before anything happens to you.” Then he supposedly advised Shivaji to also call on Diler Khan, adding, “I shall send Rājputs as kinsmen with you (as a safeguard).”³³ Nor was this an isolated instance of the political deployment of a community—or ethnic—identity. A year later, when the Maratha king Shivaji was trapped in Agra, the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb ordered him to cause the tribes of his kinsfolk (*ahl-i ayāl*) to submit.³⁴

³² Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, 84.

³³ Kulkarni, ed., *Sabhāsad*, 37, 38.

³⁴ Khare, ed., PSIH, vol. 6: 3–4.

A century later, the first article in the “testament” addressed in 1754 by the first Nizam of Hyderabad to his heirs began:

It is necessary for the ruler of the Deccan who desires his safety, peace from war and the prosperity of his country to have peace with the Marathas who are the Zamindars [hereditary gentry] of this country.³⁵

In other words, the ethnic community of Marathas had to be courted even by powerful rulers whose authority notionally derived from the Mughal emperor. As late as the 1820s, Central Indian Rajputs claimed the right to fight for their lineage head even when resident in the territory of and subject to some other, neutral ruler.³⁶ Ethnicity trumped other loyalties and such networks had to be reckoned with. The dominant community might also be enumerated and the British found the idea of the enumerated community already widely held. Thus a Kavar tribal chief, Ajit Singh of Pendhra, on the remote forest fringes of Chhattisgarh in Central India, could tell a visiting official in 1821 that

by estimate, there are 940 houses of the Kavar *jāti* in this *tāluka*. 500 in Kenda, Pendhra, Uproda and Matin together; 200 in Korba, 15 in Chappha, 25 in Kapha, 200 in Chhari ... The Dūdhkavar [pure Kavar—the informant’s identity] are few in these eight *tālukas*; five or seven houses here and five or seven there. The Kavar of the other four sorts (*jāti*) are cheap (*halke*), and may be termed children of female slaves.³⁷

Here the existing system of enumeration encompassed the effort to establish a relation of ritual inferiority and social subordination. This deposition illustrates the strategies of community inclusion followed by subordination at work. It also shows us how crucial the control of the information reaching officialdom actually was. Successful assertion of status was preliminary to securing a privileged position in a new power structure.

But precisely because of this economic and political significance, that identity was also subject to efforts to gain political leverage by its manipulation. As we saw in the quote from Sabhāsad above, King Shivaji, the founder of the Maratha kingdom, made a strong claim to Rajput status in the seventeenth century. When he visited Agra, this was discussed among the various already recognized Rajputs in the Mughal train, and many were

³⁵ Translated by Yusuf Husain Khan, reproduced in S. Madhavrao Pagadi, *Eighteenth Century Deccan* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1963), 61.

³⁶ Malcolm, *Memoir* I: 546–547.

³⁷ OIOC, Mss Mar D. 46, fo. 125b.

in favor of his inclusion as such.³⁸ Down to the end of Aurangzeb's reign, Maratha horsemen in Mughal service were listed as *dakhnī Rājput* on their muster rolls.³⁹ Subsequent political rifts led to both Rajputs and Marathas dropping the connection. The resulting vagaries in ethnic classification are well illustrated from an eighteenth-century list of Hindu officials who served under Aurangzeb. This was prepared in Jodhpur and is printed as an appendix to the Rajasthani account of Marwar. Fathers and sons could end up with differing ethnic labels depending on political affiliation, pro or anti-Mughal. Some members of the Bhosle house were labeled "Dikhñī" (southerner) and others given the aristocratic identity of "Mareṭho".⁴⁰

These identities were sometimes adjusted for political advantage: thus two brothers of the Gond ruling house of Deogarh were converted to Islam by Diler Khan and the domain conferred on them.⁴¹ In 1719, a grandson received an appointment of titular rank 700; the document was seen and translated by C.U. Wills. The grandson is described as "resident of Islamgarh [Mughal name for Deogarh] Sheikhzada by caste."⁴² But in the nineteenth century, the lineage maintained hypergamous marriage links with "Hindu" Rajgond chiefdoms, and was regarded as "pure Rajgond."⁴³ I do not know whether Wills translated the usual form found in the muster rolls, *naḥar Shaikhzādeh*, as "Sheikhzada by caste," or whether some collective noun is indeed to be found in the document. If so, as we saw in Chapter 1, it is likely to have been the Arabic *qaum*.

In fact, we have innumerable Marathi records where the indigenized variant of the term *qaum* appears as *khūm*. Many of these result from the enumeration and identification of soldiers, which was a more frequent and important process than the ethnic diplomacy of ruling houses, and gives us another entry into the world of Mughal classification. Mughal commanders were effectively military contractors, who drew pay for and undertook to muster specified numbers of armed men. They were obviously more

³⁸ Jadunath Sarkar, "Shivaji's Visit to Aurangzib," in *House of Shivaji* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Edition, 1978), 146.

³⁹ Rafi Ahmad Alavi, "New Light on Mughal Cavalry," in *Studies in the History of Medieval Deccan* (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1977), 20–39.

⁴⁰ Narayansingh Bhati, ed., *Mārṡād-rā Parganān-rī Vigat* vol. 2 (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1969), 490–499.

⁴¹ Khare, PSIH vol. 6: 74.

⁴² C.U. Wills, *Rajgond Maharajas of the Satpura Hills* (Nagpur: Central Provinces Government Press, 1923), 223–224.

⁴³ Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India c. 1200–1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 124.

interested in the former than the latter, and so detailed muster-rolls, brands, and so on, were used in the effort to prevent fraud. Some late seventeenth-century muster-rolls give the name of the trooper, his father's name, describe the appearance and ethnic origin of his horse in some detail, and then give a brief ascriptive identity to the soldier—*nafar Shaikhzādeh*, *nafar Rajpūt*, *Marethe*, *Afghān*, *Sā'dat*, and so on.⁴⁴ The pay received might vary according to the class of the soldier. The qualities of different groups were also discussed in imperial circles. Aurangzeb once expressed curiosity as to whether an infantry officer was a Brahman (the term used was *zunnardār* or wearer of the sacred thread.) A courtier said he was, and added that “*zunnardār* men are good soldiers.” The emperor responded, “we know that in our realm *zunnardārs* are soldiers.”⁴⁵

We see, then, that in managing both high politics and military manpower resources, knowledge and use of community identities were essential components of political management and military administration: stable governance required both.

Fiscality and Identity

Beyond high politics and military management, administrators needed also to be aware of local caste distributions in assessing taxes. The enumerations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that facilitated these assessments followed real lines of social cleavage, divisions that determined individual life-chances and created blocs important for social survival and reproduction. These lines of cleavage continued into the nineteenth century, and were recorded by the British. In 1832, for example the Governor-general wrote a long minute summarizing the progress of British land assessments in north India since 1807. The effort to assess tax on the basis of soil quality had proved unworkable. This was because, as one officer pointed out more than a generation later,

Brahmins, Rajpoots and other privileged classes are allowed to hold the land at reduced rates, one reason for which is, that they are not assisted in the labours of the field by their women and children, as is the case among [various caste-names] all the lower castes.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Bhikajirao Bhosle, ed., MIS vol. 26 (Dhule: Rajvade Samshodhana Mandala, 1946), 198–202 (Persian texts, Marathi summaries).

⁴⁵ Khare, PSIH vol. 6, 40–41.

⁴⁶ Cited in *Selections, N-W P* (1872), 368.

Another officer from Farrukhabad district noted in the 1870s that in addition to facilities for irrigation, and so on, affecting the productivity of particular soils,

we have the consideration of caste influencing *husbandry* by its peculiar crops and *produce* by its various modes of cultivation—such a method of assessment does not appear adapted for those provinces where the tillage of land differs much according to the location of tribes. An industrious Koormee cultivator of the potatoe (*sic*) near Furruckabad has a liberal return from a farm at Rs 3¼ per beegah, which an Aheer or [Dalit] would refuse to rent at a third less.⁴⁷

In Bareilly district in the 1870s, the settlement officer S.M. Moens often found such concessional rates, but argued that they usually reflected an affiliation with the landlord or a reputation for violence rather than simply caste status. He pointed out cases where tenants of lower castes held land at concessional rates because the landlord belonged to their community. Rents were usually not increased for them because “tribal feeling is against it and a respect for tribal feeling is very strong still.” Brahmans holding from an “old-fashioned” Hindu landlord might pay less; but on one Hindu-owned estate they paid more, because land they managed produced less than if a peasant caste (Kachi) held it. Finally, the locally dominant caste of Ṭhākurs, even though reduced to tenants, could also use force to prevent increases. Ṭhākur Jymul Singh, one of the most powerful landlords of the district

tried the experiment of raising the rents of some illegitimate descendants of his grandfather and got decrees from ... the Collector's and Judge's Courts. The defendants waylaid Jymul Singh and his two brothers as they were coming back with their decree from the Judge's Court and literally cut all three to pieces with *tulwars* [curved swords] and for this crime escaped all punishment for want of legal evidence against the culprits.

Moens added that privileged tenants of that community “have had a very quiet time of it in the district ever since.” In another place, the new landlords of a village refused to even accompany Moens across its boundary because the dominant Katheriya Ṭhākurs had threatened to murder them if they ever did so. The Ṭhākurs “were likely men to keep their word, for in the previous five years four had been hanged and several transported for murder.”⁴⁸ Such tactics would have been even more widespread under precolonial governments (and are not lacking under postcolonial ones) which probably

⁴⁷ *Selections, N-W P* (1872), 368–369.

⁴⁸ All citations from S.M. Moens, *Bareilly Settlement Report*, 112–114.

explains the routine identification of villages by the caste of the dominant inhabitants. For example, in the 1660s, the Jodhpur minister Nainsi recorded that, of the ten villages in the division named Rohath, seven were “purely” held by Patels, one was under the mixed ownership of Patels, Rajputs, and Bamans, and two others were held by Patels and Bamans jointly.⁴⁹ Dozens of pages of his massive gazetteer are devoted to such listings.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the slow penetration of central authority into the locality or village cluster. This did not mean that community organizations ceased to matter: but central authority now reached down to identify and control leaders of occupational and status communities. These processes were certainly well established on the west coast by the beginning of the seventeenth century. In 1621, the dues payable to the chief accountant of the port of Ceul (near Bombay) by members of different groups were specified. The sources of these dues were arranged in two columns that clearly followed the state’s tax-roll. One column was classified as *jaribe* (by measurement) and the other as *taifedār* or payable by the community. The latter groups, it seems, would negotiate directly with the assessor. These included goldsmiths, shopkeepers (*bakāl*), Muslim weavers (*mumīn*), washermen, tailors, soap makers, “Dośis who sold colored cloth,” and so on, and then moneylenders who were grouped as Parsi, Musalman, and generic *bakāl*.⁵⁰ Records of this type clearly underlay large-scale estimates such as that found in Nainsi’s famous *Khyāt* (compiled 1660–1672). Describing the city of Jodhpur, he grouped its inhabitants into eight classes, with estimates (*unmān*) of their numbers in each class: 2,000 houses of *mahājans* [bankers and traders]—Osvāl, Mahesārī and five others; two scribal castes, mainly Pancolis; 1,500 houses of Brahmins; and so on for six other classes.⁵¹

Administrative processes obviously required unambiguous classification, or else some might pay twice and others escape altogether. Where maximal communities were subject to tax, they were identified by grouping smaller units together. Thus when the Emperor Aurangzeb re-imposed the *jizya* poll-tax on his non-Muslim subjects in 1679, officials obviously had to be able to identify those liable to the tax and also classify them into three

⁴⁹ Narayansingh Bhati, ed., *Mārṇād-rā Parganān-rī Vigat* (Jodhpur: Oriental Research Institute, 1968), Part 1, 191–382.

⁵⁰ SCS 7, Pune 1938, 8–9. *Bakal* is Persian for merchant—so perhaps Hindu merchants.

⁵¹ Badriprasad Sakariya, ed., *Munḥta Nainsī-rī Khyāt* (Jodhpur: Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, 1984), vol. 1, 30.

groups according to their relative wealth.⁵² A.R. Kulkarni has published some late seventeenth-century *jizya* records from western Maharashtra. Although the tax collection was superintended by a deputy and the local *qāḍī*, it was evidently conducted by the hereditary *deśmukh* (chief) and *deśpānde* of the *pargana*. It would seem that they already maintained house-lists organized by *taifa* or community. So while the payers are listed by name and father's name, these are arranged by *taifa* (here used for caste)—for example, “*taifa Koṣṭī*—persons 5 at 3 ½ rupees (each).”⁵³ It is evident that this imposition like others was collected through caste headmen.

Such records were also prepared by the successor states in the eighteenth century. It is again evident that the information was gathered by requiring community heads to report on their members. This extended into the countryside. The eighteenth-century Marwadi-language reports on the tax settlements in various districts of Rajasthan printed as an appendix to S.P. Gupta's monograph begin with a statement of the measured area and then deduct the uncultivable and uncultivated. Then they go on to report on the number of farmers and plough-cattle available for tillage. Such data are obviously functional. But we also get a glimpse of the social organization of information, in that the breakdown of these aggregates is given by caste group. For example, there were 70 Mālīs with 123 oxen, or 8 Gujars with 18 oxen, 51 Telīs with 28, and so on.⁵⁴ The ordering of information by statistically irrelevant caste-group indicates that the source must have been a caste headman or leader. Clearly therefore authority *and* information were ordered through these social units.

Thus the fixing of identities and recognition of leaders was an important part of routine administration at the imperial and local levels, and an essential preliminary to enumeration. A major motive was fiscal; various collectivities had diverse burdens to bear, and the vigilant tax collector needed information on them. But the differential demands on various groups were themselves calibrated to the power, numbers, and status of the communities that had an existence independent of the registers and tax rolls. A record of community identities was necessary at this level—dominant communities were often exempt from taxes, while special levies existed on

⁵² Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 120–121.

⁵³ A.R. Kulkarni, *Medieval Maharashtra* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1996), vol. 1, 192–208 (in Marathi); text actually has the abbreviation ‘taa’ for *taifa*.

⁵⁴ Satya Prakash Gupta, *Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan c. 1650–1750*, 264–268 (Appendix in Marwadi).

subordinate ones. So, for example, marriage taxes in the Bhosla kingdom of Nagpur were differentiated by caste: in around 1820, at Umred, near Nagpur, weavers paid 3 rupees, oil-men 2 ¼, Mahars 3, Dhivars 2, and so on. Similarly the Nagpur records of 1811 listed communities and dues ward by ward. Grocers, grain dealers, tobacco vendors, sellers of colored powder, lac dealers, Mahar weavers and so on, were all enumerated and listed at different rates.⁵⁵ As B.G. Gokhale's work shows, the same was true of Pune where, for example, the 1770 house-list of Budhwar ward (*peth*) listed many different *khūms* or communities.⁵⁶ An unpublished document from 1778–1779 from the ward named Bhavānī lists 22 taxable groups grouped living in 177 houses. These were professional and caste communities such as casual laborers, washermen or makers of water pipes and regional (Multānī), and some occupational, some hybrid like the 16 households described as major or state bankers (“Sarrāph”), Brahmans etc. who paid house-tax at the highest rate.⁵⁷ These lists were regularly maintained, as is evident from an order sent in 1775 to the local officers of Sāsvaḍ, a town near Pune. They had to prepare and dispatch the very next day a house-list of “shopkeepers, weavers, dyers,” and so on, and also bankers who dealt in bills (*hundivāle*).⁵⁸ Obviously their capacity to supply the information depended on lists being at hand.

Aside from enabling the state to assess and collect money, caste communities could sometimes function as sources of mutual defense against abuse by the ruling power. In 1746, Raghuji Bhosle, the ruler of Nagpur, chanced to hear of the two beautiful daughters of a wealthy coppersmith (*kasār*) and sent men to seize them. The *kasār* rebuffed them. When a larger number were sent, he drew a sword and killed his daughters. The *kasār* community (*firkā*) was strong in the city and rallied to his support. Seven hundred of them gathered and fought Raghuji's men, and five or ten were killed. All the *kasārs* quit the city in protest.⁵⁹ The visible occupation of public space was also frequently a point of contention (and often still is). This has been documented extensively for coastal Tamilnadu by Niels Brimnes and Susan Bayly.

⁵⁵ British Library, Oriental and India Office Collection Mss Mar D.31, folio 68 for Nagpur; D.44 for Umrad—answer to question 26.

⁵⁶ Balkrishna G. Gokhale, *Poona in the Eighteenth Century* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 36–37.

⁵⁷ MSA-Pune, Ghaḍnī Pune śahar rumāl, 523.

⁵⁸ Oturkar, *Patrayavahāra* 1950: 5; the names are those of the makers and sellers of various goods.

⁵⁹ Sardesai, ed., SPD, vol. 20: 26–27.

Many conflicts arose over public routes of processions and also over insignia carried and other honorific markers. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, disputes over such issues were a fruitful source of Hindu-Muslim conflict.

So the ranking of castes was in play for purposes other than assessing taxes, of course. The logic of caste dominance was extensively explained to the early English government in Bombay by the Prabhu caste, which claimed the right to carry a ceremonial umbrella in religious processions. They explained this by saying that “their Cast had formerly been Kings or Rajahs of this Island & that [the] rest had all been Subordinate to them,” and this allowed them to carry an umbrella. The Bhandari caste militiamen contested the claim in 1724, and an affray ensued.⁶⁰ Judicial processes also provided object lessons in hierarchy. In 1782–1783, Jivegaudā, a village headman under the Brahman prince of Miraj, detained a Brahman in connection with some dispute. The latter complained, and the headman was arrested; the local officer wrote to his superior recommending that as he had paid a process fee (*masālā*) of five rupees, he should now be warned and let off. But prince replied:

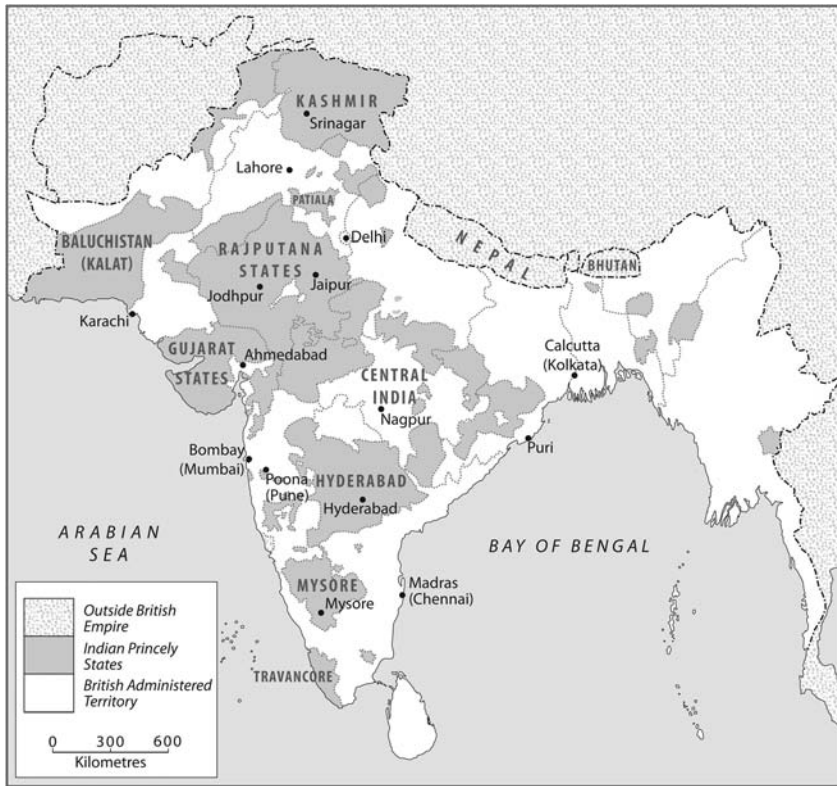
The *masālā* was due and has come. But this being a Brahman domain (*rāj*) the headman who assaulted a Brahman cannot escape without a serious fine. If people are made properly fearful then nobody will again venture to cross a Brahman's path.⁶¹

This, of course, was to be an object lesson—a confirmation of the identity of a dominant community. The ideology of the Peśvāi as a Brahman regime was widespread. After Raghunath Rao organized the assassination of his nephew and sought the support of the English in his effort to seize the throne, his wife Ānandibāi was arrested. From detention in 1778 she taunted the dominant regent, Nana Fadnis, that his family had held the post for three generations yet his heart was unaffected when the Brahman state was being overrun and subverted by the Yavanas (in this context, the English).⁶²

⁶⁰ BL OIOC, Bombay P/416/99 Sitting of March 25, 1724, “The Report Concerning the Purvoes.”

⁶¹ Vasudeva V. Khare, ed., *Aithāsik Lekhasaṃgraha* 26 vols. (Pune and Miraj: The Editor, 1901–1926), vol. 7 3751–3752.

⁶² *Itihāsa Saṃgraha* I, 4 “Aitihāsik Ṭipaneñ” 28–29. The phrase is ‘*yavanākrānta brāhmaṇī daulat fiturāni hou lāglī*’. The term *brāhmaṇī* is repeatedly used to refer to the state.



Map 4. British India—Political c. 1900

Such were the categories of social life and social conflict, which, though not created by the state, could be lucrative sources of income for it as its officials penetrated local community networks and disputes. Thus there was a prolonged (and expensive) feud over status between the tailors of Pune and Sāsvaḍ, a nearby small town, in the 1770s. The feud originated when the former readmitted one Gangājī Sarvaḍ into the *jāti* without consulting their caste-fellows in Sāsvaḍ. The near-by tailors complained to the government in Pune. A high-level *jāti* council was assembled at Pune under state supervision. In March 1773, it declared the Pune tailors to be in the wrong; the government fined them the considerable sum of 15,000 rupees, in an era when a laborer was paid forty rupees a year. The tailors of Sāsvaḍ, in turn, had to pay 10,000 rupees as process fee to the state.⁶³ Membership of the

⁶³ Oturkar, *Patravayavahāra*, 133–138; SPD, 22: 133.

winning or losing community would have to be accurately determinable for such sums to be levied. Their self-ascribed identities might also be curbed by state action; in the late eighteenth century, it was found that members of the tailor caste who had taken to dyeing were mixing with and marrying members of the indigo-dyer caste. The local officers of Sāsvaḍ subdivision warned them to desist and maintain the traditional boundaries.⁶⁴ We need to remember that this information probably came from a disgruntled member of the community, and was, again, a source of income to the officials concerned who would certainly have collected a fine or at any rate a process-fee for their pains. Business issues could, of course, also be organized on caste lines. In 1795, the caste of indigenous merchants of Jejuri offered to pay a hundred rupees to the *pargana* officials if the Gujarati shopkeepers were removed from the village.⁶⁵ Equally, these cases illustrate the interpenetration of social identity, social regulation, and royal fiscality. When Appadurai writes of “precolonial” regimes that enumerative activities were tied to taxation but not to group identity, he is operating with an anachronistic modern outlook in which taxation is run by the Treasury and social regulation is the business of Health and Human Services.⁶⁶

Given that large sums were being extracted from a large number of relatively impoverished people, the presence of community leadership was an administrative prop of the state. But this institution could itself yield a profit to the ever-hungry functionaries of the Sarkār. We have already seen how the manipulation of gentry conflicts provided both information and money to the state. Nor were religious leaders exempt from such processes, as the case of Nagpur Gosains that we have discussed in Chapter 4 shows. The eighteenth century was (as Chapter 6 discusses more fully) the epoch of military fiscalism. The search for information was an inescapable part of the drive for revenue—local society was already deeply fissured by the twin processes even as the East India Company began its conquests across South Asia.

Let us now sum up the material surveyed so far. We see that the state and its agencies certainly penetrated and modified society itself, but they entered it as tree roots grow into rock—along its extant fractures and potential flaws. Social groups usually knew and sometimes had to account for

⁶⁴ Oturkar, *Patrayavahāra*, 100–101.

⁶⁵ Oturkar, *ibid.*, 83–84.

⁶⁶ Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination” in *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament*, Peter van der Veer and Carol Breckenridge, eds., 330.

their members, and enumeration was used and understood. An important result is, I feel, is the discovery of the extent to which local communicative processes that renewed and conserved community identities influenced the political processes that generated officially recognized public communities. The blissful continuum of premodern collective life was not suddenly and arbitrarily sliced up by colonial modernity. Local communities had long had to deal with intrusive states that penetrated along and augmented the fissures in local society.

The Arrival of Colonial Statistics

The arrival of colonial rule did not initially change classifications and procedures much. For several decades, the same structure of village officers was commissioned to collect the information required by the new administration, and continued to do so in much the same ways as it had before British rule. In areas where previous regimes had not installed such an apparatus, impressionistic judgments and guesswork provided such understanding as was available. But the new rulers also brought with them the intellectual baggage of eighteenth-century Europe, notably its interest in “political arithmetic” as an instrument of governance. The Western development of demography as a discipline allowed James Mackintosh, speaking at the founding of the Literary Society of Bombay (1804) to be quite specific in his analysis of the sources of population change. He recommended inquiries into the

numbers of the people; the number of births, marriages and deaths; the proportion of children who are reared to maturity; the distribution of the people according to their occupations and castes; and especially according to the great division into agricultural and manufacturing; and the relative state of these circumstances at different periods, which can only be ascertained by permanent tables, are the basis of the important part of the knowledge.

This was also the early reform epoch inaugurated by Governor-General Cornwallis (1786–1795), when administration was dominated by suspicion of “native agency.” Published information, Mackintosh felt, would offer a device to cross-check information supplied by almost unsupervised employees at great distances from headquarters.⁶⁷ On the other hand, there

⁶⁷ “A Discourse at the Opening of the Literary Society of Bombay 26th November 1804”

was often a great reluctance to spend much on information. So this is the period of the early statistical inquiries, where individual officials were sent out to gather information by local inquiry and observation—the epoch of Colin Mackenzie, Francis Buchanan, James Tod, William H. Sykes, and so on.

In retrospect, we can see that the success of these men depended somewhat on their own qualifications and energy, but largely on the capacities of the extant indigenous apparatus of knowledge. We may contrast Colonel Sykes, who acted as statistical reporter on the plateau region of Maharashtra in 1825–1829, with Francis Buchanan, who did a quick survey of Mysore (1800) and then of eastern India (1807–1813). Sykes had long commanded Indian troops and clearly knew some Marathi and Hindustani. On the other hand, Buchanan was entirely dependent on translators. The former also dealt with a more manageable area than the latter. But perhaps the most important difference was simply the availability to Sykes of a system of village accounts and records built up by at least two centuries of effort by various regional governments. Buchanan, on the other hand, made little use of such data, even where, as in Mysore, it existed. His scholarly contemporary Vans Kennedy described Buchanan's research methods: he would arrive after writing to the British officials in various places. They would order the "principal natives or any with whom Mr Buchanan wished to converse" to assemble. Buchanan would then demand answers to various questions through an interpreter.

With the natives he was unable to converse personally; and the form and circumstances under which they were assembled were alone sufficient to prevent them from communicating, either freely or faithfully, the information required.⁶⁸

Obviously Kennedy deemed Buchanan's data fanciful and tendentious and their internal inconsistencies support his belief. Sykes, on the other hand, was able to travel to individual locations and speak directly with local farmers and others directly, and even with bands of farm laborers encountered

by James Mackintosh printed in Abstract of the Society's Proceedings Official, Literary and Scientific; reprinted in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh Complete in One Volume* second edition (London: Longman, Green, Brown and Longman, 1851), 535–542; see especially 540–543.

⁶⁸ Vans Kennedy, "Remarks on the Sixth and Seventh Chapters of Mill's 'History of British India,' Respecting the Religion and Manners of the Hindus" 117–171, *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* Vol. III (1823): 125–126.

on the road. But most important, he could send out standard printed forms to several thousand village accountants and secure a fairly high response rate. Unlike Buchanan he could also directly supervise the officials who processed these returns. The existence of the apparatus of record that generated his data was the result of centuries of state-sponsored institution building in peninsular India. It was not universally present in South Asia.

The new demographic outlook transported from Europe, however, brought about a major change in the style of enumeration. Where all previous administrations had thought it sufficient to enumerate houses or enclosures (*khāna*), the British government wanted to enumerate their human inmates individually. In passing, I would suggest that earlier disinterest may be attributed to the mobility of population in South Asia, making migration the major determinant of population size in specific realms. Practically every narrative of settlement originating in seventeenth or eighteenth century India explained population as due to the influx of settlers attracted by tax concessions and administrative benevolence. The West European concern with fecundity was therefore absent; equally, it was not necessary for earlier administrations to penetrate into the household to ascertain its demographic parameters. We may see this at work in, for example, the memorandum for the *pargana* of Chatsu in eastern Rajasthan for the year 1779–1780. It stated the increase in the number of tenants and farm oxen over the previous year and explained in terms of immigrants from other districts, as well, new farm households established from the resident population. The exact structure of the household was not examined.⁶⁹ The administratively simpler task of counting houses was adequate to measure trends in population and depopulation. The British administration, however, was especially suspicious of vagrants and migrants, and in any case drew on European commonsense notions about the appropriate objects for enumeration. They wanted to know the numbers of men, women, and children, not merely of households.

This puzzled the local officials used to the old modes of counting but they could adapt. The record of their puzzlement can be found in the manuscript census returns from Central India that they submitted to a touring official over the years from 1820 to 1822.⁷⁰ Puzzlement is manifest

⁶⁹ S.P. Gupta, *The Agrarian System of Eastern Rajasthan c. 1650–1750* (Delhi: Manohar, 1986), 258.

⁷⁰ These are in Marathi, in the cursive Modi script, and now in the India Office Collection, London.

in the very titles of some of the reports. Thus the first, that relating to Umrad subdivision, is headed "House list and looms and oil-presses and a head-count of men, wives, kept women, young children, etc." The tabular statement's column headings are houses, looms, oil-presses, men, women, boys, girls, slave women—and for fear of missing out on information needed by this inexplicable new master—even persons in the womb. The rows list sixty communities. But the officer in the next subdivision simplified his task by presenting houses grouped by community in the time-honored fashion, then separately presenting the aggregate of persons under the following classes: men, boys, and home-reared male dependents or slaves; wives of all ages, daughters, and slave-women. In another subdivision the local official also resorted to attributing caste or community to the houses, but not entering the thorny issue of the social identities of their inmates, something highly ambiguous in the case of slaves, slave-women, and the slave-born.⁷¹

Further west, in the Bombay Presidency, W.H. Sykes was grappling with similar problems. The returns that he received from subordinate Indian officials comprised a multiplicity of identities, creating bulky and unmanageable statistical tables. Furthermore, the returns were statistically diverse and reflected the local identities that confronted officials in specific places. More comprehensive categories were needed, and Sykes, no doubt guided by Brahman scholars, simply divided the people into Muslims and Hindus, and the latter into Brahman, Rajput, "Shoodruh" or Maratha, and Ati-Shudra or outcastes.⁷² The classification of the Marathas as *śūdra* was part of Brahmanical orthodoxy in southern India, where the doctrine was that in the present degenerate age all trace of the *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya* had disappeared. But the Rajputs of Rajasthan (*kṣatriyas* according to British orthodoxy) were seen by colonial authorities as useful allies against Marathas and Muslims alike, and this may have led Sykes to allot them the second rank in his scheme. Thus a distorted version of theoretical division of the Sanskrit normative texts was drawn over the diversities of a complex and fractured society.

Such efforts were not without contemporary indigenous parallel. In 1822, the four Pandias or priests who presided over the shrine of Amarkantak at the source of the Narmada River were asked about the population of their hamlet, they promptly sought to arrange it according to the four-varṇa structure of classical Hinduism but then had to add a fifth—Gosāin (belonging to

⁷¹ British Library Mss, Mar D.44, folios 24b–27a; 66b–67a; 128a and *passim*.

⁷² British Library India Office Collection, Mss Eur D.148 and 149.

an ascetic order). The priests later provided a more detailed enumeration, with Brahman distinguished into northern and southern, the Kṣatriya into Rajput and Sikh, the *vaiśya* composed of carpenters and shopkeepers, and ten communities (including Gosāin) now classed as Śūdra.⁷³ So the confused effort to thrust theoretical categories onto extant social groups was not confined to colonial officialdom.

Twenty years after Sykes's census of 1826, the Government of Bombay once again asked its Indian officials to enumerate the population. The basic ordering seems to have been religious: people were first of all classed as Hindu, Muslim, Jain or Shravak, Parsee, Jew, and Christian. For some obscure reason, the Jews and Siddis (East African Muslims) were grouped together under 'miscellaneous.' Within 'Hindu,' it was found that the number of castes reported varied in number from 12 to 70 in different districts of the same region. In the southern districts, a long-running status feud between Citpāvan and Sāraswat (Shenvi) Brahmans led to the latter being classified separately from "Brahmans." The local-language returns were sometimes roughly translated into English: Currier, Barber, Smith etc. The Koli tribe appeared with the strange gloss of "Junglee Arrowmen"—probably a literal translation of *jangli tīrandāz*. It is fairly evident that the organization and compilation of the census had been largely in the hands of Indian officials, and metropolitan ideas intruded mainly in the survey's penetration beyond the walls of the household to enumerate the inmates within. It is also evident that the census takers had functional goals and were continually confronted with vigorous local identities that reshaped the measures that counted them. For example, the Bombay government census of 1845–1846 was conducted in a period when outbreaks of insurgency among the forest tribes had seriously perturbed the government of the province. Reviewing the census returns, the Governor of Bombay commented that it was

a great object to ascertain the different classes of the population with reference to their habits and occupation. With this view all classes who are considered turbulent and predatory should be distinctly shown.

The Governor in Council proposed therefore that instead of the confused medley of castes, the next census should classify the people into eight groups: Hindus, Wild Tribes, Low Castes, Shravaks or Jains, Mussulmans, Parsees, Jews, and Christians.⁷⁴

⁷³ Mss Mar D.46, folios 142a, 143a.

⁷⁴ The tables and documents were not published at the time; they were printed 30 years

Race is noticeably absent from this classification, whose major axis is religious, though cross-cut by an anxiety about law and order issues. This changed after the great anti-colonial uprising of 1857–1858 and the inter-racial bitterness that followed. Religious identities and the balancing of religious identities in the interest of British rule became matters of central concern. Nonetheless, the different regions maintained their chaos of categories. In 1865, the compilers of the *Statistical Abstract Relating to British India* sought to present a consolidated table of the populations of the three Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras. But the table betrays the incoherence of the concepts underlying it. Calcutta distinguished Europeans from “Indo-Europeans”, but mingled “Native Christians” with the latter, while in Madras the Indo-Europeans were amalgamated with the Europeans but Native Christians distinguished from them. The Greeks in both Bombay and Calcutta had the dignity of a separate identity—neither European, nor Indian, nor African, but just Greek. Finally, the Chinese males of Calcutta were separately counted, but their Christian wives included among Indo-Europeans. The Bhatias, Hindu merchants from Kathiawar, were dignified with separate entries in Bombay, alongside Buddhists, Brahmans, and Lingaets—quite possibly because the Brahman officials who did the actual compilation had no idea of who exactly Bhatias were and did not possess the British desire for systematization.⁷⁵ It is not difficult to enlarge upon the fallacies and inconsistencies, tropes and clichés of the censuses, province by province through the decades, but I will not lengthen this book with such exercises.

The later nineteenth century saw a substantial filling out of the statistical basis of British administration as new cadastral and revenue surveys, records of rights and systems of registration of transactions, built up the knowledge base of a new style of administration. Meanwhile, the old services and dues attaching to specific communities were commuted, allowed to lapse, or replaced by devices such as the license tax and the income tax. So the administrative rationale of the indigenous-style census records gradually withered away. At the same time, the need for aggregated population counts was emphasized for measures such as famine relief in the wake of the catastrophic Orissa famine of 1866 and several similar calamities.

later as a separately paginated appendix to Volume 2 of *Report of the Census Taken in the Presidency of Bombay 1872* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1875).

⁷⁵ Great Britain, India Office, *East India Statistical Abstract Relating to British India from 1840/1865* (London: HMSO, 1867), Table 4, <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/>.

The old house-lists based on local perceptions of community nonetheless continued to be generated. The records of the Bombay Survey contain specimens of them from the 1850s and 1860s.⁷⁶ In western India, they were perhaps systematically replaced only after 1873, when the first edition of T.C. Hope's *Manual of Revenue Accounts* appeared. That replacement itself required the gradual measurement of the land, field by field, and the installation of relatively permanent boundary marks. These cadastral surveys never covered all of British India and were not completed in the Permanent Settlement areas of eastern India until well into the twentieth century. But after 1891, land survey reports increasingly relied on census population data for their information, and the old tradition of the *khānaśumārī* house-lists died out. The new statistical apparatus was finally in place: the use of crop-cutting sample surveys for yields only followed after independence in the mid-twentieth century.

As the census was gradually detached from everyday taxation and administration, it soon fell prey to the scholarly ambitions of assorted senior bureaucrats. Indeed, as ambitious ethnographers helped each other up the bureaucratic ladder; it was almost inevitable that the machinery of the Government of India would be adapted to generate the data they needed. This is particularly evident in the all-India censuses of 1901 and 1911. During the preparations for the census of 1901, the Government of India wrote to the Secretary of State for India,

India is a vast storehouse of social and physical data which need only be recorded in order to contribute to the solution of the problems which are being approached in Europe with the aid of material which is much inferior in quality to the facts readily accessible in India.⁷⁷

The new ethnography certainly found an interested audience in the nascent Indian public, which began to participate in the debates. As early as 1890, a north Indian newspaper, the *Oudh Akhbar*, presented a garbled account of H.H. Risley's anthropometric survey. Risley also provoked an upper-class Bengali Muslim to write a rebuttal that purported to show that Bengali Muslims were not local converts (as Risley claimed) but purely descendants of aristocratic West Asian and Arab immigrants, just a *little* changed by

⁷⁶ For example, in the appendices to the *Papers Relative to the Survey and Assessment of Eight Pergunnahs and Two Pettahs of the Khandesh District* in Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government: New Series No. 93. (Bombay: Government of Bombay, 1865).

⁷⁷ D. Natarajan, *Indian Census Through a Hundred Years* (Delhi: Registrar-General, 1972), vol. 2, 545–561, reprints this correspondence.

impoverishment and exposure to a sun hotter than that in their ancestral homeland.⁷⁸ Risley's measurements and statistical analysis were crude to the point of absurdity. They led to much pamphleteering as various castes tried to assert their status but had however, no policy effect (as we shall see in Chapter 6).

But the explosion of print certainly enhanced a shift already begun, in which the control of information slipped from local worthies, traditional genealogists and marriage brokers to new print media. Astute officials had long known how to deploy such connections. When Rivett-Carnac sought to introduce new strains of cotton in Central India in 1867, he persuaded several hereditary officials from Nagpur to accompany him to Berar (Varhād). One of them was a hereditary *deśmukh* who brought "an elaborate genealogical tree (in which all deshmoookhs glory)" with him. He was thus able to trace a link between himself and his local equivalents since, Rivett-Carnac observed, all the *deśmukhs* of the region were more or less related. (In other words, they were beginning to emerge as separate caste stratum from the Maratha caste-cluster, which in turn distinguished itself from the Kunbi cluster.) Rivett-Carnac added presciently that lineage branches separated by two centuries and two hundred miles of difficult terrain were now once again in contact because of the newly opened railroad.⁷⁹ Looking back over the past century, we can also see that faster communication opened the path to consolidation into the modern 'Maratha' caste. The rails and telegraphs also brought a new print culture. So a few decades later, in 1904 Radhakrishna, assistant to C.E. Luard, Resident in Central India, prefaced a collection of bardic poems with the comment that even among conservative Rajput princes traditionally powerful bards were now little regarded, as Indian-language newspapers were "better heard in circles high, than the utterances of a whole host of these bards ..."⁸⁰

Previously, relative status had depended greatly on oral tradition and the dicta of professional genealogists and men in authority like the *deśmukh* who accompanied Rivett-Carnac. That practice endured longest in the

⁷⁸ The *Oudh Akhbar* report, cited in Khondkar Fuzlee Rubbee, "On the Origins of the Mussulmans of Bengal," (1897); reprinted in *Journal of the East Pakistan History Association* 1, 1, (1968) 48; Rubbee's pamphlet was a rejoinder to Risley and initially written in Persian. It was subsequently translated into English.

⁷⁹ *Report of Mr H. Rivett-Carnac Cotton Commissioner for the Central Provinces and the Berars on the Operation of his Department for 1867* BPP: Commons no. 289 of 1868–1869, 30–31.

⁸⁰ "Collection of Songs made by Radhakrishna for C.E. Luard Esq., ICS," BL OIOC, Mss Hin D.I prefatory letter 25-1-1904, fo. 1b.

socially fluid Himalayan region. The local king “was the fountain of honor” and instances were known of caste promotion to a higher caste for “service done or money given ...” Hill rajas derived a regular income from fees paid for restoration to caste.⁸¹ Manipulation of such status was an important resource for the kingdom of Nepal, as important new work by Sanjog Rupakheti shows. Decrees from the Court could elevate or reduce caste rank and change liability for enslavement, for example.⁸² In India, however, many simply turned to the colonial law courts where, for example, Bengal Regulation III of 1793 explicitly allowed suits on caste disputes.⁸³ Where structures of community authority were already feeble and moneyed men eager to rise, lawyers and information brokers had (or purported to have) great power.

Let us take Bengal as an example. Mughal governance was but weakly established over contending regional lords when it was subverted by the East India Company and a period of chaotic upheaval ensued. Emerging nouveaux riches contended for status and inevitably split into cliques.⁸⁴ Genealogists spread self-glorifying anecdotes and concealed their books. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, a well-informed Bengali of the scribal Kāyastha caste heard that a maltreated genealogist had excluded the Mustaṭfi lineage from the aristocratic (*kulīn*) marriage circle of the Dakhinrāṭhī segment of Kāyasthas because the head of the family had insulted him. But despite belonging to that Kāyastha segment himself, the author could not tell what the Mustaufis’ status really was.⁸⁵ Still, the pretension to control such information obviously provided a source of power and profit. An eighteenth-century Bengali genealogical manuscript collected by D.C. Sen, for example, contained the monitory tale of how the genealogists had gone to call on Śrīkṛṣṇa Bhāduṛī on the occasion of a marriage. But he did not see them. So then they said to each other, “Oh, an aristocrat with such contempt for genealogists! Come, let us see what defect we can find in his lineage.” According to their story, they duly found one that needed to be expensively

⁸¹ Alfred Lyall cited in Ibbetson, *Panjab Castes*, 7.

⁸² Rupakheti, “Leviathan or Paper Tiger? State-Making in the Himalayas, 1740–1900,” 154–159.

⁸³ Kikani, *Caste in the Courts*, iii, 6–7.

⁸⁴ S.N. Mukherjee, “Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815–1838,” in *Elites in South Asia*, Leach and Mukherjee, eds.

⁸⁵ Girīścandra Vasu *Sekāler Dārogār Kāhinī* reprinted in *Dusprāpya Sāhitya Saṁgraha—tṛtīya khandā* Kalikata: Riphlekt Pablikeśan, Kancan Vasu ed. (1991–1992), 211–212. First publication not recorded—author lived 1824–1898 and was in central Bengal in the 1850s and 1860s. Contrast this to Rivett-Carnac’s *deśmukhs* for whom leadership in a *pargana* political structure conferred recognized genealogical authority.

expiated.⁸⁶ The role of such men as marriage brokers enhanced their power especially, one assumes, among the many *nouveaux riches* of the colonial era.⁸⁷

That changed as these genealogies began to find their way into print and then be compared with the emerging archaeological record. The distinguished historian R.C. Majumdar made considerable efforts to locate and conserve genealogical manuscripts, and he carefully compared these narratives with the emerging epigraphic and other historical sources. His conclusion by the 1930s was that at least some of them were being updated as material contradicting them emerged, and that original manuscripts were often untraceable.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, new print media began to bypass the protean and cryptic manuscripts of the genealogists as Bengali literati engaged in heated debates in new periodicals.⁸⁹ As we shall see in Chapter 6, the historically significant classification and policy decisions were being made in Delhi and Simla on the basis of the hard numbers of the Census of India—and increasingly focused on religious blocs.⁹⁰ Events in the 1940s marginalized such Bengali genealogical debates, as social changes, economic struggles and the Nehruvian sociocultural project became dominant preoccupations all across India.

This chapter has examined the history of statistical records in a South Asia that was always part of larger political, economic, and information systems. It has suggested the impact of global changes on local systems. An important result is the illumination of the important impact of local social and political processes that conserved and renewed community identities on wider political processes—those that generated officially recognized public communities. There was no blissful continuum of premodern collective life suddenly and arbitrarily sliced up by colonial modernity. Local communities had long dealt with intrusive states that had penetrated along and augmented the fissures in local society. The evidence endorses C.A. Bayly's judgment cited in the beginning of the chapter. The community structures of feeling and communication that states worked with survived

⁸⁶ Extract from the text named '*Paṭi vyākhyā*', in *Barṅgabhāṣā o Śāhitya* 2 vols. [1901] reprint, Dineś Candra Śen ed. (Kolkata: Pascimbanga Rajya Pustak Parisad, 1986), 2 volumes, vol. 2, 1675–1676.

⁸⁷ Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 25–30.

⁸⁸ Rameścandra Majumdar, *Barṅgiya kulaśāstra* (Kalikata: Bharati Buk Stal, 1973).

⁸⁹ See Majumdar, *ibid.*, 1–2, 108–109.

⁹⁰ Kenneth W. Jones, "Religious Identity and the Indian Census," in *The Census in British India*, N. Gerald Barrier, ed. (Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1981), 73–102.

into the colonial era; always political, the communities responded to the opportunities of new politics and to the dialectic of colonialism and various nationalisms in the twentieth century. Many identities were not fabricated by enumeration and could survive its end. They remain vigorously present in India and Pakistan down to the present day. The story of their changing boundaries and consequent relation to state power through the twentieth century is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

EMPIRES, NATIONS, AND THE POLITICS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY, C. 1800–2000

Indian society is exceedingly complex, so people here have an extremely large number of identities available to them, upon which they may fix when they think of themselves.

– James Manor, 2010¹

The Transformation of Community, Locality, and State in the Early Modern Era

We have seen how local political organizations were adapted and modified through recent centuries as intensive political competition, enhanced information flows, and the strengthening of markets (including those for military force) changed their internal structures and external relations. The once-solid frame of the village cluster was sapped by military-fiscal regimes through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and largely dissolved in the nineteenth. The segments that once cooperated in its political and economic life separated into *khūms* (castes), cooperatively segmented only at the village level. In urban areas, specialized professions and business communities were usually able to maintain corporate life.² That the village still maintained itself as a significant organization was in due in great measure to its adaptation to the collective imposition of state burdens as well as the rents and gifts that its collective life generated. In the early modern era, a new information order generated increasing amounts of recorded

¹ James Manor, “Prologue,” xxxiii.

² Hiroyuki Kotani, “Structure of the Caste in Seventeenth-to-Nineteenth Century Western India: The Rural Caste in the Deccan and the Urban Caste in Coastal Gujarat,” in idem, *Western India in Historical Transition* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 63–85; Edward A.H. Blunt, *The Caste System of Northern India: With Special Reference to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 106–107.

information, even though its control was often a jealously guarded source of individual profit. A variety of active markets expanded their reach; the administrative charge of large areas, the fiscal management of entire states, the services of small armies, hereditary rights over districts and villages as well petty village office, individual units of land and the bodies of men and women—all began to be traded for money. Military fiscalism broke down older boundaries and domains of authority: markets in the seventeenth and eighteenth century were free as never before or since.³ Finally, a new identity began to appear among the many already present among the diverse populations of the world—that of putatively equal citizens of an ethnic nation that aspired to statehood. Its gradual adoption worldwide was to bring the military-fiscal era to a slow end. Some historians like Dirks have argued that ‘traditional’ caste decayed, leaving a novel organization deeply imprinted by colonial discourse and practice. On the other hand, Susan Bayly proposed that trends to hierarchy visible in the eighteenth century were reinforced in colonial times even though anti-caste movements also found the space to organize themselves.⁴ In this chapter, I expand her argument chronologically, rooting it more deeply in the historic past and expand its spatial reach by looking at the politically vital province of (colonial-era) Panjab, where the trans-religious character of this organization is most strongly exhibited. Indeed here we can easily see the phenomenon of different “criteria of social awareness” operating to produce structural differentiation in society.⁵ I show the colonial masters themselves creating a bounded corporate ruling caste as part of their strategy of state-building. Changes beginning in the mid-nineteenth century significantly modified the structures of sociopolitical opportunity. The ever-labile structures of social identity reorganized themselves. In the twentieth century electoral politics began flattening hierarchy with the consequent ‘massification’ of castes into ethnic blocs. Competitive electoral politics in independent India reinforced this but bounded ascriptive identities or castes

³ Here I partly follow David Washbrook, “Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History 1720–1860,” *Modern Asian Studies* 22, 1 (1988): 65–67, 74–76.

⁴ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics*, 64–79, 229–232.

⁵ The quote is from Kothari, “Introduction”; he writes “a relative decline in the importance of pollution as a factor in determining caste hierarchy, and the diminishing emphasis on the summation of roles as involved in the *Jajmani* system, do not by themselves involve any basic destruction of the caste system, but only a shift in the crucial criteria of social awareness and the structural differentiations through which such an awareness is mobilised and organised” (7).

still remained as one of the durable forms of political organization in the country. But more hierarchical patterns of tribal organization have persisted wherever electoral processes were less stable, notably in rural Pakistan.

The Shaping of the East India Company's State

The East India Company state emerged out the increasingly fluid, violent, and commercial Eurasian world of the eighteenth century. It was, in many ways, an intensified expression of all these phenomena.⁶ The Company depended on the judicious use of force from the beginning of its career in Asian waters, and was periodically mulcted by the Mughal state as well as the English monarchy. Its ships and the sailors it supported were important to the Royal Navy in wartime, when the impressment of sailors and ships was essential to the navy's successful operation. The Mughal emperors several times sought to enroll it to police the Arabian seas and also held it responsible for the misdeeds of members of its *qaum* (the English) on land and sea. As it flourished, it was also integrated into the patronage system that managed British politics in the age of Walpole. To the mid-eighteenth century, therefore, the East India Company was a rising participant in the unstable politics of the Indian subcontinent, before being catapulted into a position of central importance at the beginning of the nineteenth.

This should not disguise the novelty of the phenomenon the Company's rise to hegemony represented. Complex organizations depend on reporting and communication in order to exist. This was achieved by the European empires and trading companies via a normalization of oceanic navigation that made communication (for its time) predictable and dependable—though it still took half a year for London and Calcutta to exchange a single question and answer. Beyond their unquestionable superiority in oceanic navigation and naval warfare, the Europeans had for at least a crucial fifty years a massive, if shrinking lead in the techniques of land warfare.⁷ But their successes also turned on the other phenomenon long ago identified by Ibn Khaldun as needed for successful state building—*‘asabiya*, or fierce communal solidarity that minimized the need for supervision and increased effective initiative.

⁶ Washbrook, "Progress and Problems," 1988, 68–70.

⁷ R.J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas* 4 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009), vol. 4: 1507–1565; valuable discussion of weaponry *ibid.*, 1540–1541. This work contains some factual errors but draws on an immense mass of new documentary material from the Dutch and Portuguese archives.

One component of this solidarity was an old one in Eurasia: the zealotry generated by Christian and Islamic *jihads* around the Mediterranean littoral. In the sixteenth century, it was renewed by the analogous fanaticisms of the Reformation and counter-Reformation across all of Europe. Another component was a growing racial prejudice that solidified the solidarity of the European-born when far from home.⁸ The Portuguese and Spanish multinational empires early exploited this as a management device, and so it naturally pervaded the Catholic Church.⁹ Discrimination, however, generated sporadic resentment among the Creole and assimilated elites who were necessary for the workings of an administrative system half a world away in Asia or America. In 1787, for instance, the Viceroy in Goa discovered and suppressed a conspiracy of Goan Christians to stage a rebellion that aimed to oust the Portuguese and “transfer power to the natives and especially the caste of Brahmans to which they themselves belonged.”¹⁰ It is, however, likely that the creation of a hierarchy of *castas* in the eighteenth century Americas dissipated racial feeling across multiple social boundaries, to the benefit of the imperial center. So as late as 1771, the Mexico City council in a formal address to the Crown emphasized the eligibility of “American Spaniards” for office by emphasizing their genealogical distance from ugly, dirty and uncultured natives.¹¹ Something similar was achieved in Portuguese India where disputes over nobility and caste precedence among Goan Catholics—especially between the two *castas* known as Chardos and Brahmans, began in the sixteenth century and persisted to the eve of decolonization. This effort, as Angela Xavier perceptively observed, solidified the power of the Portuguese crown by making it the arbiter of such status disputes.¹²

Meanwhile, strong internalized loyalties to the ‘mother country’ among metropolitan personnel enabled the effective deployment of the new technologies of what might be called pragmatic literacy that spread steadily

⁸ Jack P. Greene, “Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution,” in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, Wm. Roger Louis, ed., volume II, editor: P.J. Marshall (New York: Oxford University Press 1998), 208–252.

⁹ Charles R. Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion 1440–1770* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), Chapter 1, ‘Race Relations’.

¹⁰ J.H. Da Cunha Rivara, *A Conjuração de 1787 em Goa e varias cousas desse tempo: Memoria Historica* [1875] Reprint (Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990), 13–14, “especialmente aos da casta bramane, a que elles pertenciam.”

¹¹ Martinez, *Limpieza de Sangre*, 260–261.

¹² Angela Barreto Xavier, *A Invenção de Goa* (Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciencias Sociais, 2008), Chapter 7 and 384, 417.

across the early modern world. It was this that permitted the systems of record and control to flourish, allowing checks and punishments to be effective at six months' sea distance. Men died or retired or absconded; the records remained and were updated. The new techniques of record and measurement were of course, intimately tied with the rising business classes the world over. Economic-military colossi like English East India Company thus added new mercantile devices to the repertoire of their nascent states.¹³ But the Company's hybrid nature—part commercial enterprise, part military-political power—and its ultimate inability to ensure full compliance from employees in India meant that it was weakened by networks of private trade rent-seeking, like that of the shipping interest that enormously inflated freight charges, to the detriment of the Company itself.¹⁴ Still, on the whole, through most of the eighteenth century the Company successfully managed its personnel, focused their ambitions on returning to the homeland, and adroitly navigated the troubled waters of the times.¹⁵

The conquest of Bengal (1757–1765) temporarily destroyed most of these controls. Most seriously, it undermined the power of the London political establishment, as newly enriched employees returned and converted their sudden wealth into seats in the House of Commons. A few years in India were seen as a passage to wealth and prominence in England.¹⁶ Ships' captains had long had a recognized right to sell their appointments to qualified successors. Now junior appointments to positions as low as writers and even military cadets began to be sold to all comers for sums of £500 or more.¹⁷ But

¹³ H.V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Chapter 6.

¹⁴ Parkinson, *Trade in the Eastern Seas*, 175–190, for the shipping interest, 368–372 for sales of appointments etc.

¹⁵ These inefficiencies were revealed only after peace and the end of their commercial monopoly in 1814 exposed them to private competition. Bowen, *Business of Empire*, 257–258.

¹⁶ Lucy S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), esp. 47–48, 84–87. Also Peter J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India and America c. 1750–1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). An observer from New England wrote darkly in 1773 that in a few years both Houses of Parliament would “be filled with Omrahs and Subedars, nurtured in the corruption and despotism of the East.” Quoted in Marshall, *ibid.*, 198. “Omrah” is from the honorific plural meaning “nobles” and “Subedar” from the Persian word for provincial governor. Here obviously used loosely to refer to ‘orientalized’ grandees of despotic bent.

¹⁷ There were recognized brokers like J.A. Shee, offering a “Bengal Cavalry Cadetship or one in the Artillery or Engineers in any Presidency; also a Bengal Writership price 3,500 guineas, the former appointments 500 guineas each.” Parliamentary Paper (Commons) no. 91 of 1809, *Report from the Committee Appointed to Inquire into Any Abuses in the Disposal of the Patronage of the East India Company*, 3–12, 76.

while the scramble for Indian money destroyed the fiscal stability of the East India Company, it strengthened loyalties to the home country to which the new recruits hoped shortly to return enriched. Thus the ambitious Nawab of Arcot was surprised to find in 1775 that the highly paid Englishman he had enlisted to command his new infantry would not serve against the East India Company in Madras or even merely assist his scheme for murdering the governor, Lord Pigot.¹⁸ Of course, Company employees were prepared to act against their employer in their own interest. So the Nawab and his allies then launched their complex fiscal schemes to control the Madras government, which resulted in the coup that overthrew and then incarcerated Pigot (who was reported to have refused a bribe of ten or fifteen lakhs of *pagodas*, or about £300,000 to £500,000, from the Nawab).¹⁹ Ultimately, this resulted in the Nawab's English cronies managing to mulct the Government of India of considerable sums of money.

Such losses indirectly weakened the Company by draining it of the resources it needed to support its expensive civil and military establishments. According to Marshman's history, its patronage appointments in India were worth (or cost) no less than £2 million annually in 1783.²⁰ Many of these posts were sinecures created to oblige friends and patrons, which resulted, by the 1780s, in a huge excess of Company employees with little or nothing to do.²¹ In the reform era that followed defeat in America, the political classes in England managed to agree on measures to stabilize the situation and gave Lord Cornwallis the authority to do so. His reforms went a long way to lay the foundations of British rule in South Asia. But the centrality of caste loyalty for the working of the new bureaucratic system was (as we saw in Chapter 4) soon starkly demonstrated to the English ruling classes.

In the last years of his term Cornwallis antagonized the officers of the East India Company's own army. This nearly precipitated a coup that might have created a Creole dominion in India or led to the collapse of all centralized European authority in the subcontinent. That eventuality was nar-

¹⁸ Mark Wilks, *Historical Sketches of the South of India* (London: Longman, 1817), vol. 2: 224–226. Wilks, writing at a time when such betrayal was unthinkable, termed this an “absurd confidence ... in an absolute oblivion of their prior and paramount duties as Englishmen.” Downloaded from <http://www.hathitrust.org/>.

¹⁹ Henry D. Love, compiled and ed., *Vestiges of Old Madras* reprint 4 volumes in 3 (New York: AMS, 1968), 3: 224, 120–121. Pigot was charged by his enemies with receiving a bribe from the Raja of Tanjore instead.

²⁰ John C. Marshman, *The History of India* (London: Longman, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1871) I, 431.

²¹ Peter Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 180–183.

rowly averted by mobilizing such of the King's troops as were available and tapping the military labor market in north India. General De Boigne, a retiring Savoyard officer in Śinde's service, for example, promised a force of Maratha cavalry for use against the Company's mutinous officers; he was also persuaded in 1796 to transfer the services of his personal bodyguard of 600 horse, 100 camel dragoons, and four guns for a payment of £20,000 (to himself).²² But as we saw in Chapter 4, what ultimately saved the East India Company from being overthrown by its own military officers was their wish to keep open the possibility of a return to England. The Governor-General Richard Wellesley and the Commander-in-Chief, his brother Arthur Wellesley now recognized the strategic value of attachment to Europe. In 1802–1803 in preparation for the war with Daulatrāo Śinde, the Maratha ruler who controlled the rump Mughal empire in north India, many of the white officers who commanded the most formidable parts of Śinde's army were bought out with promises of equivalent employment or repatriation. This disruption of command structures and even more, the mutual suspicions that these desertions necessarily generated on the Maratha side played a significant role in the defeat of the most redoubtable army that the British had yet faced in South Asia.²³

It was the political value of this sense of European-born identity that, as Indrani Chatterjee has shown, led the Company to assiduously limit the development a local power elite with any genealogical depth. It also caused the Company to discourage the immigration of unofficial Englishmen into India. All this was designed, as we saw in Chapter 4, to preempt any local claim to the "rights of Englishmen" that had just been forcefully raised in North America. The disavowed India-born offspring formed a socially inferior class of Eurasians, excluded from power.²⁴ The large increases in the covenanted civil service's sanctioned pay instituted under Lord Cornwallis also meant that service in India allowed for return to England with a substantial nest egg in middle age. The steady improvement of communications with mail going via Suez also meant that social and emotional ties to the mother country (at this point the preeminently most successful nation-state

²² Raymond Callahan, *The East India Company and Army Reform 1783–1798* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 173–175.

²³ Randolph G.S. Cooper, *The Anglo-Maratha Campaigns and the Contest for India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), devotes Chapter 5, 213–283, to documenting this successful effort.

²⁴ See Indrani Chatterjee, "Colouring Subalternity"; a fuller discussion is in Chapter 4.

in the world) were a sufficient safeguard against disloyalty.²⁵ Entry into the covenanted service was, until 1854, confined to those nominated by directors of the East Indian Company and assumed to be of English birth. Despite the above-noted occasional scandalous sales of appointments,²⁶ the British Empire in Asia remained mainly a kin-linked patronage bureaucracy presiding autocratically over an Indian empire. Indeed, a Manchester critic writing in the mid-nineteenth century was not exaggerating hugely when he termed it “an hereditary civil service ...”²⁷ David Washbrook gives an instance of this: the Arbuthnot family provided four generations of Madras civil servants and was able to found one of the largest business houses in India as a consequence.²⁸ Thus the maintenance of a strict ethnic boundary brought benefits to individual lineages and the emerging colonial state.

British India showed some tendency to develop towards *casta*-ranked society, but countervailing forces were too strong for this to congeal firmly.²⁹ But the improvements in communications and reform of government that had given the East India Company state its power in Asia also led to closer supervision from Britain. Direct rule by the Crown (from 1858) ensured greater answerability in Parliament. The rising power of British commercial interests began to bend the Indian government to its purposes by the 1840s. That intensified steadily through the century, and it pushed ahead the agenda of what has been called the imperialism of free trade throughout the empire. We shall return to these ethnopolitical processes later in this

²⁵ As W.H. Sleeman described it, sisters at home in England provided a species of unpaid magistracy through the recollections that controlled the feelings of their brothers in India. Sleeman, *Rambles and Recollections*, ‘Preface.’

²⁶ See p. 179, note 17.

²⁷ C.J. Barter cited in Arthur W. Silver, *Manchester Men and Indian Cotton 1845–1872* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 51.

²⁸ David Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870–1920* Indian Edn. (Delhi: Vikas, 1977), 216.

²⁹ Recruited into the railways, Anglo-Indians almost became a “railway caste” in the only government body that gave them preferential employment. As late as 1923, nearly half the Anglo-Indian community was employed in state railways or was dependent on a railway employee. As late as 1932, 100 percent of upper subordinate positions in state-managed railways were filled by Anglo-Indians and “domiciled Europeans.” Laura Bear, *Lines of the Nation*, 8–9. She titles this section ‘The Railway Caste’ but also notes the anomalous position of the community in British eyes.

The Viceroy, Wavell wrote in February 1946 that in the event of a Railway strike hitherto “we always been able to rely on the Anglo-Indian element ...” but even they would now hesitate knowing that the British were leaving. Penderel Moon, ed., *Wavell: The Viceroy’s Journal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 210.

chapter, but the next section will focus on its socio-economic effects within the already volatile markets and property systems of the Indian subcontinent.

Markets, Property, and State Power

Mark Granovetter has recently shown that social norms, network effects, and self-help all have at times been highly significant for socio-economic life which is “embedded” in them.³⁰ Colonial rule was a drastic disembedding force that, however, then embedded itself on a different, indeed transcontinental scale. In the South Asian case, earlier states would usually function through merchant councils, village gatherings, or the larger formal assembly of the village cluster (*pargana*) headed by royal officers and local worthies.³¹ Proceedings might be brief and efficient but could also be extended and costly. The East India Company, which saw itself as an emanation from a higher, more law-bound society, believed that its reformed judicial system was a vast improvement on what went before. That was not how its supersessor, the Imperial government, saw it. In his 1888 survey of British government in India, the veteran John Strachey gave a scathing account of the old East India Company judicial system. But although he presented the new Civil Procedure Code of 1859 and the new Law Codes generally, as radically improving the situation, things on the ground could not have changed so swiftly.³² Nonetheless, by the mid-nineteenth century, select classes of Indians began to learn to work the judicial structure to their own ends and figure out how to mesh it with the massive information apparatus that now reached deep into rural India. The official inquiry into the anti-moneylender riots of 1875 in Western India observed that the rustic Marwari moneylender “has usually sufficient education to draw up his own plaint, and to understand law and procedure as well as his vakil (attorney) ...”³³ Whereas for many centuries the major safeguard for tenures and contracts or property rights that endured through time had been local chiefs and the community

³⁰ Mark Granovetter, “The Impact of Social Structure on Economic Outcomes,” in *Journal of Economic Perspectives* vol. 19, 1 (2005): 33–50.

³¹ For a richly documented account see Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91–102.

³² John Strachey, *India* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench and Co., 1888), 143–166.

³³ *Report of the Committee on the Riots in Poona and Ahmednagar Districts*, Parl. Papers, 1878, vol. 58, no. 2071: 12.

organizations they governed, such as the merchant council in the town and gentry gatherings in the county or village cluster (*pargana* or *nāḍu*). These could be by-passed via the new information apparatus developed by the colonial state and enforced by its judicial institutions. Both thus played an important role in widening the market, opening it to outsiders, and changing the way land rights were enforced. The rise of businessmen and lawyers also galled British officers used to unfettered authority. For instance, Thorburn complained in 1886 that whereas earlier the Deputy Commissioner's settlement of a boundary dispute between the Mazari and Drishak clans had been accepted unquestioningly, now one tribal chief had hired an English barrister and the other recruited two Indian lawyers for parity.³⁴

These disembedding developments began with the gradual mapping of much of rural India by the British. The countryside was now gradually made transparent and controllable in a wholly new way. Previous property arrangements had depended on the concurrence of the villagers and testimony of neighbors. For example, a typical land sale deed translated by W.H. Sykes was written in the presence of fifteen village officers and leaders. It recited that one Kusāji Thorat was to receive one *cavar* measure of land from the field named Sandus, the four bounds of which were defined as follows:

on the east the field called Juwadee cha Mullah; on the west ... the limits of the hamlet of Gurkol; on the south by fall of water from the hill with the milk bush on the rock in the field called Urdurru; on the north by the ... watercourse where it forms an island, separating into two streams: these are the limits. The line of your Chowar runs from the nullah outside the garden, dividing the field into two parts and terminating on watercourse of the upper well We have resolved that the *Malee* of the garden before mentioned shall permit you without impediment, to water two Beegehs of your Chowar.³⁵

It was then attested by the mark of the headman (the plough) and then by the head of every community in the village, including the artisans and Dalit village servants. It is obvious that enforcement of the claim depended crucially on the support and concurrence of neighbors who could attest the deed and knew the landmarks. This changed with the new centralized land records that were gradually generated by the colonial administration through the nineteenth century.

³⁴ S.S. Thorburn, *Musalman and Moneylenders in the Punjab* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1886), 23 note.

³⁵ William H. Sykes, "Land Tenures of the Dukhun (Deccan)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* vol. III, (1836): 368–369.

An Engineer officer, George Wingate, pioneered the new standardized cadastral survey in the Bombay Presidency. Before the survey, he wrote, neither government nor village records had any clear indication of exact boundaries. Litigation might be carried to the civil courts; but the successful litigant had in most cases to apply to the court to place him in possession—at which point fresh litigants filed suits on the ground that part of the land demarcated actually belonged to them. So it might take ten years for the winner to be placed in possession.³⁶ Now the Government survey with its stone boundary marks and village maps gradually replaced the local knowledge and community support that had determined boundaries. The same processes of marking and recording were introduced across British India—though in Bengal and Bihar this was not completely achieved until the mid-1920s. Strengthened by wealth and the new legal order, backed by the state and equipped with its records, new social groups began to displace the locally dominant communities across British India.

These intrusive processes did not pass unchallenged. Supra-village organizations, whether tribal communities or peasant village clusters, reacted in areas where they still survived.³⁷ These were often areas where tribal solidarity was strong, such as central India, for example. Repeated uprisings there have been extensively studied.³⁸ One such uprising on which little has been published was the last protest of the ancient Dakhani county assembly (*got-sabhā*) headed by its *deśmukhs*. They rallied to protest the beginnings of the new cadastral survey in the central Tapi valley in 1853.³⁹ Thousands gathered at the administrative headquarters in Dhule to protest the plan. So completely had such gatherings passed from official experience in the centers of authority such as Bombay and Pune, that the first official suspicion was that the simple peasants were being misled by hidden Brahman conspirators. Independent agency on their part was simply inconceivable. Army units were sent to the area to control the situation. Two experienced officials were also sent to manage it, and after working out an arrangement

³⁶ *Report on the Survey and Revision of Assessment in the Rutnagherry Collectorate* (Selection from the Records of the Government of Bombay II—new series, 1852), 21.

³⁷ Alexander Rogers, *The Land Revenue of Bombay* vol. I [google books library].

³⁸ K. Suresh Singh, *Birsa Munda and His Movement 1874–1901: A Study of a Millenarian Movement in Chotanagpur* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1983); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), for the Santal revolt of 1855.

³⁹ The only article is J.F.M. Jhirad, "The Khandesh Survey Riots of 1852: Government Policy and Rural Society in Western India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* No. 3/4, (Oct. 1968): 151–165.

that allowed the survey to proceed, they reported to the government of Bombay that the leading peasants such as the *deśmukh* of Yāval and the various village headmen and influential cultivators,

seem by general intelligence to be quite capable of assuming such a position and of having led the movement from first to last without assistance from the Brahmuns or others.

They also pointed to the participation of large delegations of peasants from more distant *parganas* that were not to be surveyed for several years. There was “no doubt that they obeyed the summons simply because it was issued by influential individuals of their own caste and class.” The British officials added that a year and half earlier the peasants of the eastern part of the district had assembled in thousands at the collector’s office in Dharangaon with “the object of carrying their point by a demonstration of their numbers and determination.”⁴⁰ They had then secured concessions from the collector; but this time they were persuaded to disperse after some minor concessions.

The survey went ahead, and was completed in 1866. As a consequence, the power of the peasant county organizations was seriously diminished. For a few decades there was nothing to replace it. That was why in the mid-1860s, the district collector, L.R. Ashburner, was able, in total contravention of the law, to force the peasants to cultivate a less productive variety of cotton that he groundlessly believed to be superior to the local strain. A provincial commissioner hinted delicately at this. Khandesh district, he wrote, was “a very exceptional case: measures may be carried out there which, from the different temper of the people would not be attempted in Collectorates near [Bombay].”⁴¹ The autocratic Ashburner was able to act thus in the brief hiatus between the decline of the older systems of political action and the development of the newer ones such as the Sarvajanik Sabha that I will discuss below. David Washbrook has observed this phenomenon in the late nineteenth century. Indigenous leaders of the localities were pushed further and further away from central power and contact with it was now mediated by many layers of bureaucracy.⁴²

⁴⁰ BL OIOC, Board’s Collections vol. 2534, “Letter from G. Wingate and F. Goldsmid,” para. 13, 14.

⁴¹ Sumit Guha, *The Agrarian Economy of the Bombay Deccan 1818–1941* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985), 106–108; see also my “Genetic Change and Colonial Cotton Improvement in 19th and 20th Century India,” in *Situating Environmental History*, Ranjan Chakrabarti ed. (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2007), 307–322.

⁴² Washbrook, *Provincial Politics*, 214–216.

New systems of political action soon emerged in the vicinity of administrative centers where Indians had begun to get the measure of the new administration. Civil bodies such as the Thana Forest Sabha (adjoining Bombay city) and the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (1870) were formed. In the 1880s the empire-building drive of the Forest Department was met with firm opposition from the Thana Sabha and also fell afoul of the hitherto dominant Revenue Department.⁴³ A Forest Commission was, in fact, appointed as a result of numerous petitions and protests organized by coalitions of upper-class landlords and forest villagers. The mildly critical report of the commission resulted in an apoplectic fifty-page response by an anonymous forest officer through two issues of *The Indian Forester* for 1887. He accused upper-class Indian leaders of having instigated the entire agitation to gain money and fame. Regretting the ouster of Richard Temple as provincial governor and the conciliatory stance of the new governor, Lord Reay, he fulminated that in the past five years, "the agitator has come to know his blatant powers, and the ousting of the ryot [peasant] by the sowcar [moneylender] has made tremendous strides." While the Forest Department officials were represented as high-minded custodians of government fiscal rights in the forests, the leaders of the Sabha were depicted as landlords and moneylenders who wanted unchecked control over the district and its inhabitants. They were sweeping the poor tribals off their lands.⁴⁴ This was soon to be the standard official response to the nationalists: Lord Curzon was to present it at the subcontinental level. But it was not entirely baseless, either: the Warli tribals in interior Thana district were in fact gradually being ousted, and the District Collector's report on this predated the forest controversy. He wrote that the Warlis "fall easy victims to the bullying Parsi and the astute Brahmin or Marwari They have practically lost all their land which lies within easy reach of the railway."⁴⁵ Such political and social inconsistencies were to bedevil the Congress movement and government into the next century and prove its Achilles heel in Bengal and Panjab. But they were also to

⁴³ See Sumit Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*, 165–168, for evidence and discussion of this.

⁴⁴ "The Bombay Forest Comission," in *The Indian Forester: A Monthly Magazine of Agriculture, Forestry, Shikar and Travel*, W.R. Fisher, ed., vol. 13 (1887), 410–429; 454–474. Hundreds of miles away, S.S. Thorburn wrote acidly of the unrepresentative nature of "town-bred exotics", adding "The 'people of India' are the dumb, toiling millions inhabiting the villages, hamlets and scattered homesteads." *Musalman and Moneylenders*, 54.

⁴⁵ Long excerpts from the Collector's report are cited in A.F. Woodburn, "Report of 27th April 1889," in *Papers Relating to the Working of the Deccan Agriculturist's Relief Act 1879* (Bombay: Government Press, 1894), 2 vols., 2: 61–63.

force Indian political leaders to develop wider following, often by mobilizing older ties for novel purposes. New community or caste boundaries would often result.

Pacification and a New Agrarian Order

The new system of land management and record and the unprecedented transparency that it gave to local property, combined with the long-run tendency to moderate inflation and population growth between 1860 and 1930, gave land a new value.⁴⁶ It became a favorite investment for any savings made in the countryside, driving returns down to 5 percent or less.⁴⁷ At the same time, some of the more extortionate aspects of the land-tax system fell afoul of the political economy of the Manchester school, which aimed to undermine the power of monopolists like the East India Company and open world markets to free trade. The pace of 'modernizing' and developmental reform intensified in Britain and her Empire. British capitalists had long been irate at the smallness of the Indian export market and the unsuitability of its raw cotton for machine production. That concern intensified across the political classes of Britain during the previously mentioned 'cotton famine' (1862–1866).⁴⁸ Thus landed property was allowed to gain value without a corresponding rise in direct taxes. Together with the new records system and the stronger judicial administration, all this began to gradually tip the balance of power against the survivors of the eighteenth-century military-fiscal order, whether great landowners or petty chiefs and in favor of newer men with the social and monetary capital to profit from both the reformed administration and the more competitive markets that developed under Crown rule.

Furthermore, the powerfully coercive state that emerged by mid-century inspired considerable awe: those who could borrow its aura could act almost unchecked. We may cite evidence taken from the inquiries of the Deccan Riots Commission. Adroit use of the civil courts enabled moneylenders who moved into the countryside to establish an unprecedented rural dominance.

⁴⁶ Sumit Guha, "The Land Market in Upland Maharashtra c. 1820–1960: Part I—Ownership Rights," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* XXVI, no. 2 (1987): 117–144; Guha, "Agrarian Bengal"; Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 78.

⁴⁷ See Sumit Guha, "The Land Market in Upland Maharashtra 1820–1960 Part I."

⁴⁸ Silver, *Manchester Men*, 42–52.

Local potentates great and small found themselves enfeebled by this. In western India, the widespread boycotts of and attacks on moneylenders in 1875 (the "Deccan Riots") were led by village headmen and other worthies. The official inquiry into the riots observed that protest had moved down from the village clusters of Khandesh in 1853 to the village level in 1875. As in Khandesh, officials inquired carefully into the leadership of the outbreaks and found no basis to infer that the peasants were "acted upon by persons of higher position and education." They were largely led by the village headman and other village officers; organization was confined to that level.⁴⁹ But the outbreaks were repressed, and thereafter the village headman (unless a big landowner) gradually declined into a petty functionary at the beck and call of every regular government employee. By the twentieth century, one collector reported that many headmen felt that their major duty was to supply free provisions to traveling government employees. The collector of Kolaba described the general decay of the village community in 1903:

the whole of our administration for years past has unfortunately tended to destroy this organization where it did exist We have displaced the patil by the Third Class Magistrate, the panch by the Sub-Judge, the jaglia by the constable; and any corporate interest and initiative in village affairs that were formerly to be found by that egregious institution, the Taluka Local Board.⁵⁰

This was the consequence of developments that, as Washbrook noted, began in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. They saw the British colonial state achieve a degree of penetration and control over South Asia that no previous government had ever achieved. The vestiges of older socio-political organization began to wither away. In 1857–1858, a massive army and civilian revolt was successfully quelled and the native population effectively disarmed. Despite occasional grumbling from non-official Englishmen,⁵¹ they never became a class of Creole settlers on the South African or Latin American model; nor, indeed, did most of them wish to settle permanently in India. But ironically, after a half-century of opening markets, abolishing local transit fees and other impediments to trade, eliminating

⁴⁹ *Report of the Committee on the Riots*, 54, 4.

⁵⁰ BL OIOC Bombay (Confl.) Revenue—Lands vol. 7193: Papers on Village Police, 20; for delivery of free supplies see 23; Mr Cama cited by W.W. Drew, Commissioner of the Southern Division of Bombay Presidency.

⁵¹ As in the anonymous *Brahmins and Pariahs: An Appeal by the Indigo Manufacturers of Bengal to the British Government, Parliament and People for Protection against the Lieut.-Governor of Bengal* (London: James Ridgway, 1861).

rent-receiving intermediaries, and securing the mobility of capital and the fungibility of property, the British government was after 1858 suddenly anxious to preserve traditional potentates and structures of power in North India as bulwarks against the forces they had themselves set in motion.

Meanwhile, the complex structures of the state needed and created an initially small Indian elite associated with or knowledgeable about the machinery of the modern state. They manned the immense lower tiers of the Government of India. Their power and social importance rose with that of the state they served.⁵² But most of them were not, in fact, the 'traditional leaders' who were now suddenly (after 1858) valued as conduits of fealty to the Empress of India. In a vast and diverse subcontinent there were, not surprisingly, major divergences in the composition of this subaltern class across regions. This reflected both long regional histories and the accidents of conquest. Broadly speaking, these resulted in five macro-regions of British India.

The first was the area of scribal dominance that covered most of the southern peninsula and (undivided) Bengal; here literati officials and record keepers (mainly Brahmans in the south and three traditionally literate Hindu castes in Bengal) had secured many coveted rentier positions on the land under previous regimes. Pliable, adaptable, and literate, they were positioned to quickly dominate much of the British administration, and indeed migrated out with it as far afield as Panjab. The second macro-region was the Gangetic plain from western Bihar to approximately Delhi. Here landed gentry—of sacerdotal, scribal, military, or tax-farmer origins—were dominant. This was a long-settled and fertile area that had long supported a complex and differentiated structure of land rights. Its turbulent history in the eighteenth century precluded the eclipse of men of the sword by literati.⁵³ The third macro-region, Sind, displayed a similar pattern, with Baluch overlords as the latest conquest elite. The power of the sword and of the purse contested social dominance in the fourth region, Gujarat, in the eighteenth century, but both the military-fiscal regime of the Marathas and the mercantile-fiscal needs of the British led to the eclipse of the native military classes there. Aspirant peasants changed their social aspirations to

⁵² For a perceptive study of this process see Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency 1870–1920* [1976] Indian edition 215–221.

⁵³ Anand Yang, *The Limited Raj: Saran District 1793–1920* Indian edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 160–162, 230–239; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj* Indian edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979).

conform to the merchant model.⁵⁴ South Gujarat became the classic seed-bed of Indian capitalism across the Indian Ocean and now the world. Across the fifth region, the Panjab plain, the Sikh kingdom of Ranjit Singh had systematically reduced the power of Hindu and Muslim landlords, except for religious worthies of all faiths. So the British found that important chiefs were those who could function as tribal leaders in the rural polity of the greater Panjab; in the cities, a similar idiom of clan fraternity (*biradari*), as David Gilmartin tells us, worked to create horizontal political solidarity on religious lines.⁵⁵ It was the region selected to be the sword-arm of the British Empire in Asia.

It is, I argue, these anterior historical structures that generated the regional pattern recently observed by Christophe Jaffrelot. He observes that the Non-Brahman movement in the south and west adopted Dravidianism in the nineteenth century, and this allowed the ethnicization of caste and the quest for power to proceed together. In the north, he states “the pervasive ethos of Sanskritization” that legitimized upper-caste power hindered the process, but it was later overcome after policies of positive discrimination had their impact. I would argue that the ‘ethos’ originated in regional variation in social structure.⁵⁶ The strong military-fiscal regimes of southern and western India had generated a powerful and influential scribal official class who were predominantly Brahmans. Their importance increased under the British imperial state as records and record-keeping grew in importance. Their power and prominence made them the focus of social resentment, which increased in proportion to their ubiquity in the ranks of the

⁵⁴ As Shroff and Shah astutely observed in 1959, “neither is the kingly model dominant nor are the Rājpuṭs in power The business model is dominant in Gujarat. Baniyas are the traditional businessmen and Patidars [farmers] have taken to business.” A.M. Shah and R.G. Shroff, “The Vahivanca Barots of Gujarat: A Caste of Genealogists and Mythographers,” 63, in *Traditional India*, Singer ed.

⁵⁵ This characterization is drawn from Sumit Guha, “Serving the Barbarian,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (2010), no. 4; Sumit Guha, “Agrarian Bengal 1850–1947: Issues and Problems,” *Studies in History* (new series) 11, 1 (1995), 119–142; Tajul Islam Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920–1947* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).

Government of the United Provinces, *Report of the Zamindari Abolition Committee*; Shah and Shroff (see previous note); Harald Tambs-Lyche, “Reflections on Caste in Gujarat,” Chap. 5 in *The Idea of Gujarat* Kapadia and Simpson, eds. (Delhi: OrientBlackswan, 2010), 156–189. David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), Chaps. 2 and 3.

⁵⁶ Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 146, 492–493.

colonial administration. They were the face of that governmental power which diminished older local domains, as Washbrook has shown. On the other hand, they both resisted missionary enterprise and provided some of the earliest critiques of colonial rule: this increasingly alienated them from the government and missionary European community in India.⁵⁷ Thus rejection of Brahman leadership with the concomitant effort at consolidating all non-Brahmans became an important current in the politics of southern India. Missionary critiques of Brahmans as racially alien oppressors of the indigenous lower castes were welcome ammunition. As a consequence, caste-based blocs and affirmative action became prominent in the regional politics of southern India several decades before their rise elsewhere.⁵⁸

Bureaucratic (as distinct from military) fiscalism, on the other hand, never managed an effective presence in today's Uttar Pradesh (which occupies most of Jaffrelot's "North"). The nineteenth-century official classes were less powerful and more diverse; indeed, for some decades, many of them were drawn from Bengal. The major divide that emerged by 1900 was between Muslim service gentry long trained in the Persian script and increasingly Hindu proponents of Devanagari. That controversy then largely contributed to the ethnicization of religious identity in north India. This in turn precluded the type of caste-centered polarization that marked the politics of government patronage in southern India through the twentieth century. The upper-middle layers of small owners and protected tenants provided much of the Congress base in this region. They usually claimed warrior or priestly status and that was often the source of their tenurial privileges.⁵⁹ A marriage of national assertion and lower-caste emancipation could not (as in southern and western India) be deployed here. These protected tenants were heavily drawn from the upper castes of each locality and were the pillars of an aggressively Hindu 'ethos of Sanskritization'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ The missionary and oriental scholar John Wilson propounded this starkly in *The Indian Military Revolt*, 14–15.

⁵⁸ O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 5.

⁶⁰ Metcalf observes that nationalist agitation in U.P. drew much of its leadership from "sons of estate servants, men of influence, often educated yet not bound to the old agrarian order ..." *Land, Landlords*, 382. A colonial official wrote caustically in 1946: "If it is thought that only zamindars 'oppress' tenants, I would point out that in this district [Ballia] far more genuine 'oppression' is done to the 'tiller of the soil' by big fixed-rate tenants than is done even in Oudh by taluqdars. Some fixed-rate tenants (including many Congress Netas [leaders]) hold up to 200 acres of land at Rs. 2 per acre and have sub-let all of it at rates ranging between Rs. 60 and Rs. 90 per acre." H.T. Lane, Collector of Ballia, in *Report of the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Committee*, III: 184.

*Political Leverage and Global Communication
in the New Imperial Polity*

A new politics was generated by the unprecedented dominance of colonial power. Regionally diverse elites naturally sought to use the new order to their own purposes. By the mid-nineteenth century, many realized that they could truly gain leverage over the government of India only by addressing authorities in Britain. Civil service selection by competitive examinations was introduced in 1854. It meant the effective detachment of Indian civil service patronage from the Board of Control and British cabinet. The directors of the East India Company also lost their power of appointment. That may have purified English politics, but it also separated the locally powerful civil establishment in India from the growing power of Parliament in Britain. The patronage autocracy in India now had no permanent patrons in that assembly. Successful applicants increasingly came from the British middle and lower middle classes,⁶¹ which socially removed them even further from the gentlemen of independent means who still largely filled the unpaid seats in the House of Commons. So the House often gave sympathetic ear to reforms that would have struck at the racial exclusiveness of the civil service.⁶²

This separation between the British political classes and the expatriate bureaucracy in India opened a small avenue for the knowledgeable and well-connected of the subcontinent to secure their own ends by direct appeal to London. But while they stood forth as equals in the Empire, their claims to representativeness were often hybrid. The compounding of old and new forms of leadership was represented in one of the largest of the early organizations. In the 1860s, discontent over the mismanagement of the Pune's Parvati shrine complex and other issues grew among the educated Brahmins of the city. Efforts at formal organization followed and culminated in the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. The Sabha's membership was sought to be representative of the communities of the region by requiring that every member enrolled after March 1871 had to produce a power of attorney (*Mooktyarnama*) signed by "at least fifty adult men" from any caste or community. The intent of this requirement is clarified by an additional clause: "should the entire number

⁶¹ Bradford Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy in India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1976), 19–21.

⁶² Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt: India 1857–1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 271–272; it was to forestall such a separation of effective power from social status that the Duke of Wellington defended the sale of Army commissions to the end of his days.

composing a community, or the town happen to be less than 50, persons holding Mooktyarnama from such community or residents shall also be eligible.”⁶³ The Sabha was thus visualized as a modernized version of the old regional council where the heads of villages and important communities gathered to judge, to attest, or to protest. But now the audience was three thousand miles away. Other such associations also arose. As early as 1880, two associations of English-educated Indians sent an address to the voters of Britain asking them to support the Liberal Party in the interests of the unrepresented people of India.⁶⁴ Rival leaders then stood forth to cultivate the Conservative party. In 1888, the retired Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Provinces, John Strachey, approvingly quoted a speech by Sayyid Ahmad Khan in which the latter argued that parity between Hindu and Muslim could never exist and emphasized the ferocious power of pan-Islamic solidarity. Even supposing that (Khan said) Indian Muslims were unable to withstand the Hindus, “our Musalman brothers, the Pathans would ... make rivers of blood to flow from their frontier on the north to the extreme end of Bengal.”⁶⁵ Pleased, the Conservative John Strachey argued that upper-class Muslims were natural allies and supporters of the British government.⁶⁶

This argument connected easily with the drive among many influential officials to create or restore a native aristocracy that was, after 1857, seen not as a drag upon progress but as a necessary element of social stability. Following the long struggle to suppress the revolt, the new government took a decisive turn toward promoting ‘natural leaders,’ who were most assuredly not the new English-educated literati of the colonial metropolises. By 1860, the political expediency of such a course seemed obvious. The Government of Punjab argued:

It is well to be careful of the interests of the people, but to be so effectually it behooves us first to look to those of our own government If there is a body scattered throughout the country considerable by its property and rank it will for certain exercise great influence If this body is attached to the state by

⁶³ Madhukar J. Jadhav, *The Work of Sarvajanic Sabha in Bombay Presidency (1870–1920)* (Poona: Dastane Ramchandra, 1997), 19–22, 28.

⁶⁴ *Quarterly Journal of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha* III, 1 (1880): 1–10; at the meeting where the address was approved, K.L. Nulkar began by pointing out that “neither the Queen nor the ministry can afford to go for any length of time against the wishes of Parliament”, 11.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Strachey, *India*, 378–379. Strachey claimed that an “educated Mohammedan gentleman of Northern India has more in common with Englishmen than with the Bengali graduates of the University of Calcutta”, *ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁶ Strachey, *India*, 224–225. Valuable evidence on this political strategy is in Spangenberg, *British Bureaucracy*, 291–293.

timely concessions ... and obtains a share of power and importance, it will constitute a strong support to the existing Government.⁶⁷

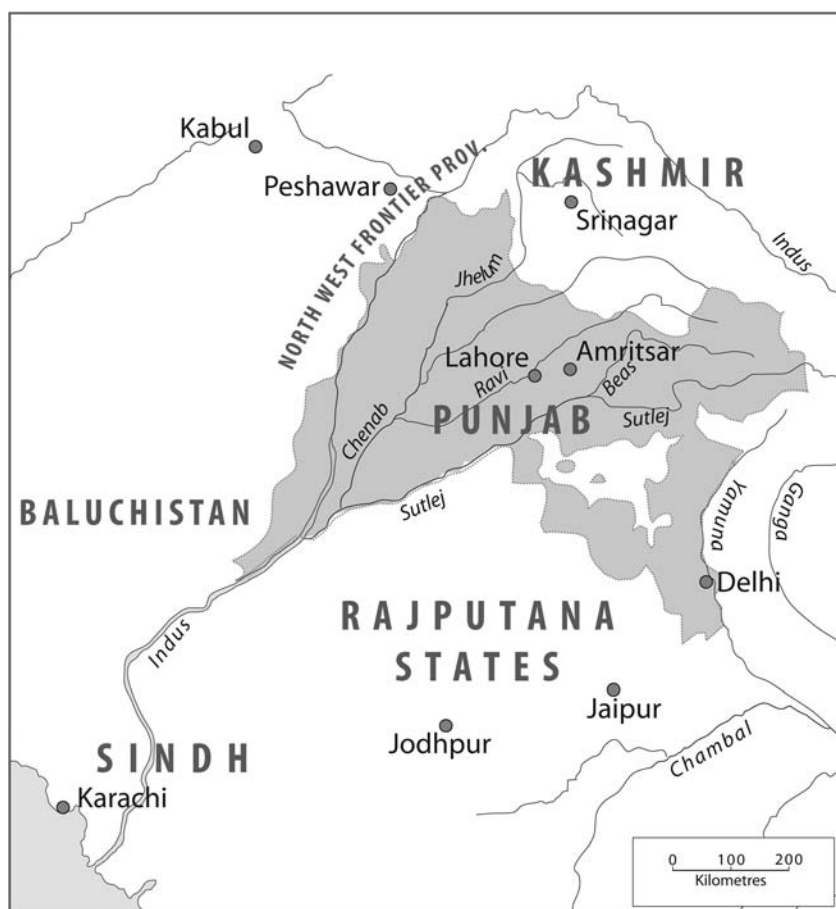
The imperial government followed this strategy for several decades, but with little political benefit; meanwhile the new literati began to organize themselves and continued the lobbying in London that so infuriated officialdom in India. The history of the nationalist movement has been amply studied by many distinguished historians, and it is not my intent to rehearse it here. Varying circumstances—including the massive external shocks of the first and second world wars and the Depression—resulted in constantly changing patterns of patronage and recognition. The broad trend was for formal power to return to the subcontinent and increasingly fall into Indian hands. But access to it was still managed by the British in terms of political advantage, and this tendency increased as political pressures, both international and domestic, upon the imperial state grew. The traditional aristocracy proved a feeble reed; even the most cosseted of them, the Awadh talukdars, could not be shaped into a serious political force. This made a more populist turn increasingly attractive, as it could be used to deride the small educated elites as a “microscopic minority” and expose their social basis in caste and landed privilege, as we saw the Bombay Forest officer already doing. John Strachey, for instance, spent many pages of his 1888 book pillorying the Indian critics of imperial government for their refusal to confront abuse and oppression in their own society. Viceroy Dufferin and Curzon also invoked this theme.

Concern for the voiceless masses grew stronger wherever the voices of the upper classes criticized colonial rule. Thus the effort to reach beneath the layer of increasingly disaffected rentiers in the Permanent Settlement areas energized the Bengal government's drive for tenancy legislation for the authentic and loyal peasants; in Madras and Bombay, the effort to undercut ungrateful Brahmans assisted the implementation of limited measures of affirmative action in the early years of the twentieth century.⁶⁸ But before the half-measures in 1886 there was no corresponding effort to protect the tenants of Awadh from talukdars. Indeed, as Thomas Metcalf has pointed out, even the 1886 law remained unenforced.⁶⁹ Nor was there any effort to reduce the over-representation of Muslim and Kayastha service gentry employed by the state in the United Provinces or Central Provinces: these last-named

⁶⁷ Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt: India 1857–1870*, Chapter 4, citation from 165.

⁶⁸ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics*, 239–240.

⁶⁹ Metcalf, *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, 381–382.



Map 5. British Panjab c. 1911

groups were largely absent from early 'seditious' agitations. These regionally differentiated stances reflected and intensified earlier social divisions that had emerged from centuries of social and economic struggle. Nonetheless, the new caste politics everywhere modified patterns of community boundaries and political action. The next section will discuss their course in the province that has had an increasing weight in South Asian history down to the present.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ For a light-hearted but very perceptive description see Dipankar Gupta, "Nor" Westerly

Panjab as the Fulcrum of Empire

The "Punjab system" was in high favor as a consequence of the administrative and military success of that provincial government in handling the Rebellion of 1857. It was clearly this success that had made the reconquest of north India possible. Furthermore, the province now became the favored recruitment ground of the Indian Army, and recruitment ran along what were perceived to be hard boundaries in local society. So the Indian Army Commission described a typical 'class' regiment as having, for example, two companies of Sikhs, two of Hindustani Brahmans and Rajputs, two of 'Punjabi Mohammedans,' and one each of Dogras (the latter were Hindus from either Jammu or Kangra) and of trans-frontier Pathans. Gurkhas formed exclusive units, and Mazhbi Sikhs were recruited into caste-specific Pioneer battalions. The idea was that Indian officers and soldiers should be in 'water-tight compartments' or subunits that would insulate them from any sense of common interest.⁷¹ The many 'tribe and caste' groupings of the Panjab as well as its loyalty during the revolt, encouraged recruiting there. The social boundaries in the Army could be maintained by recruiting along specified lines. These policies also led to a special emphasis on the peasantry and aristocracy, to the neglect of urban and commercial classes, as N.G. Barrier established through a close reading of late nineteenth-century records.⁷²

When wedded with the new preference for the maintenance or creation of traditional leaders, that meant that community boundaries were to be reinforced and 'traditional leaders' maintained to control them. But such leaders were rarely (as a class) prudent managers, and so their property and position soon had to be protected against the very forces that the imperial system itself was generating. Thus, as we saw, from 1860 on provincial governments used their patronage to draw prominent landowners into government employment, so as to balance the eager graduates of the new universities. In 1879, Lord Lytton established the Statutory Civil Service to formalize this arrangement.⁷³ But mid-Victorian bureaucracy, with its demands for literacy, punctuality, and obedience, was not attractive to aristocrats,

Winds" (Kolkata: Telegraph, 20 August 1999), downloaded December 23, 2012; <http://www.telegraphindia.com/archives/archive.html>.

⁷¹ Cited in Strachey, *India*, 62–63.

⁷² N. Gerald Barrier, "The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870–1908," *Journal of Asian Studies* 27, no. 3 (1968): 525.

⁷³ The Rules and correspondence are reprinted in Philips, ed., *Evolution of India and Pakistan*, 551–555.

whether British or Indian. "Pride and lethargy combined to keep the aristocratic classes on their estates."⁷⁴ In earlier centuries, the gentry faced real risk of expropriation or death and had real opportunities for aggrandizement. Even then, we know that many delegated their duties to deputies. Imperial India was, if nothing else, paradise for rentiers. Once they had been dubbed natural leaders of native society, a range of administrative and legal devices were created to protect them from the effects of market forces.⁷⁵

The same social engineering was attempted in Panjab. But here the policies of the Sikh monarchy and the early British administration had left relatively few big landowners in place. Major exceptions were usually religious worthies of the three faiths—a legacy with explosive consequences for Panjab in 1945–1946.⁷⁶ So as Gilmartin has shown, the turn to stabilizing 'traditional' society required the official creation of a uniform class of 'natural leaders' across an ecologically and socially diverse region. This goal led to an effort to define and stabilize social boundaries across rural Panjab, mainly through the delimitation of *zails* and 'tribal' groupings with chiefs being found for them as needed. Being a 'tribal' leader meant increasingly being a landlord who asserted his claim to leadership in a 'tribal' idiom.⁷⁷ These major efforts at social engineering represented policy initiatives in areas of vital interest to the empire. They were much more historically significant than the ethnographic elements introduced in the Census of India operations in 1901 and 1911, when a few officials ambitious for scholarly fame were able to divert a modicum of state resources to their own ends.⁷⁸ As I argued in Chapter 1, the nasal ratios so assiduously measured by Grierson and his ilk had no relevance to the recruiting officer: Gurkhas and Pathans were equally deemed martial races. Nor were candidates for government employ ever ranked by their cephalic indices (even if that metric buzzed within the variously molded crania of the Euro-American learned societies for decades).

⁷⁴ Metcalf, *Aftermath*, 273–274.

⁷⁵ Washbrook, "Progress and Problems", 80–87. The special provisions included the Court of Wards, Encumbered Estates legislation and special provision for specific classes like the Gujarat talukdars and Awadh taluqdars. Metcalf, *Land, Landlords*, 230–236; Anand Yang, "An Institutional Shelter: The Court of Wards in Late Nineteenth-Century Bihar," *Modern Asian Studies*, 13 (1979): 259–263.

⁷⁶ Banga, *Agrarian System*, 167–172, for the limited area under intermediary rent-receivers; 148–167 for the preservation and enlargement of religious grants.

⁷⁷ Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, 5, 20–21, 24.

⁷⁸ I have made this point in "The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India c. 1600–1990", 159.

The Panjab rose into prominence in an era when a new anxiety about provoking rural unrest seized the imperial administration. Incidents of rural unrest, sparked by global markets and energized by colonial reform of the judiciary, the survey records, and the disarming of the countryside, caused real worry. Less than twenty years after the revolt of 1857, an outbreak of rural protest in the central Deccan led to a commission of inquiry and special legislation for the protection of peasant debtors in the affected area. Crucially, this region had been unaffected by the great revolt of 1857–1858. But that uprising had made officialdom acutely sensitive to political danger arising from agrarian grievance. The official committee that inquired into the agrarian riots of 1875 in western India observed that in northern and central India debt and dispossession “produced disastrous results in the disturbances of 1857.” In those areas, it added,

the inexpediency of allowing a general transfer of land from the old proprietary families to the money-lenders, the *novi homines* of British rule, is a political consideration. In the Deccan the question is rather economic *than* political.⁷⁹

A few years later Thorburn declaimed that the British were now governing India for the benefit of the trading classes “jeopardising our hold on the affections of the people, that is, on rural India ...”. The issue was, he argued, especially vital in Muslim western Panjab, doorway to Afghanistan and the Russian Empire in Asia.⁸⁰ His views won adherents and he rose to be Financial Commissioner of Panjab in 1899. It was plain by then that its peasantry underpinned a military apparatus that held the British empire East of Suez together.⁸¹ It was politically vital to signal support to small farmers without alienating the gentry either. This triangulation was attempted by the Land Alienation Act of 1900. The Act provided an extensive listing of ‘tribes’—Hindu, Muslim and Sikh alike—that were deemed to be ‘Agriculturists’ and hence specially protected by legislation against the transfer of their land to ‘Non-Agriculturist’ tribes. Inclusion in either list was an unabashedly political decision. As P.J. Fagan, deputy commissioner of Hoshiarpur, wrote in 1901,

Our decision as to any particular tribe must turn largely on political considerations. The whole Act itself is confessedly an attempt to check results which

⁷⁹ *Report of the Committee on the Riots*, 42. Emphasis added.

⁸⁰ Thorburn, *Musalmans and Moneylenders*, 54.

⁸¹ Norman G. Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900* (Raleigh: Duke University Program in Comparative Studies on Southern Asia, 1966), 22–27, 115.

naturally flow from the educational, legal and fiscal systems which we have established in this country. The main pretext for such action is the political danger of the expropriation of the agricultural tribe, and therefore before a tribe is declared agricultural and brought within the direct scope of the Act, it seems proper to consider whether its numbers, position, etc., *render it of sufficient political or social importance to be considered an agricultural tribe*.⁸²

The Act was perceived as a mark of political disfavor by urban Hindus and generated a complex mix of loyalism and anti-British feeling.⁸³ By the 1930s, there was a sufficient body of litigation around the boundaries of the new 'tribes' that the deputy commissioner's power to label any particular individual as 'agricultural' was placed beyond legal challenge by an amendment to the law.⁸⁴

These strategies misfired briefly around World War I and more momentarily, World War II. Better communications, the rise of the press, irritation at missionary polemics and a consequent desire to define a purified and defensible religion—all contributed to an intensification of religious identity across British Panjab. And the zealous all tended toward emphasizing the equality of all believers in pursuing their collective duties. Hindu traders and literati gravitated to the stridently neo-orthodox Arya Samaj, and or to the overtly more traditional Hindu Sanatanis. Various movements for reform developed within the Islamic communities, all of which had by 1912 a lively interest in the fate of the Khilafat in the Ottoman lands.⁸⁵ Finally, Sikhs began to define and strengthen the boundaries of the community. Traditional *mahānts* who controlled the great shrines were in British eyes not only natural leaders but also (like Muslim saintly lineages) important loyalist landowners.⁸⁶ They now fell afoul of the purified Khalsa Sikh movement

⁸² Cited in Barrier, *ibid.*, 115; emphasis added.

⁸³ Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 13–21.

⁸⁴ Om Prakash Aggarwal, *Alienation of Land Act 1900 with Benami Laws* (Lahore: Law Depot, 1940), 115.

⁸⁵ The Ottoman Sultan was generally recognized by Sunnis as *Khalifa* or head of the Muslim community worldwide. This recognition led to a growing anxiety over the fate of that empire among Asian Muslims from the 1870s. Anxiety grew immediately before World War I when the Ottomans suffered humiliating defeats at the hands of Christian Balkan states and peaked with the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Sévres imposed by the victorious Entente powers following World War I.

⁸⁶ Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab*, 82–93; Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm*; for recent synthesis see Bob van der Linden, *Moral Languages from Colonial Punjab: The Singh Sabha, the Arya Samaj and the Ahmediyāhs* (Delhi: Manohar, 2008), Chapters 3 & 4.

that emerged from the changes precipitated by British rule and the values and social organization of agrarian Jat society. Khalsa solidarity, David Gilmartin writes,

represented a concept of religious community, increasing in popular appeal as arenas of political participation expanded in the twentieth century, a concept embedded in village society and Jat culture, and antagonistic to the hierarchies of colonial society.⁸⁷

After World War I, therefore, forces within a fractured regional society began to redraw boundaries and reject lines of authority carefully sculpted over the previous half century. Countering this trend, rural magnates and British administrators coalesced around defense of the Land Alienation Act, providing for an element of continuity and cohesion in this region. They contributed to the formation of a

strong united agrarian political party. The Unionist Party looked upon the alienation measure as the salvation of the rural populace. It carefully played down the communal issue that had been raised during earlier discussion of the legislation.⁸⁸

This party dominated Panjab politics from its formation in 1923 to the last years of World War II.⁸⁹ The system was however, briefly swept aside by the tsunami of religious mobilization that arose in the last years of World War II and immediately after. We must explain that failure.

The Panjab was vital for both agricultural products and military recruits during that war. The war brought price controls and rationing, which could only be sustained by the compulsory requisitioning of food grains. The huge irrigation projects of the previous seventy years and the favorable man-land ratio meant that Panjab was the only province with a significant food surplus. The theater of operations and major industrial centers lay outside the province, mainly in the east. After the loss of Singapore and Rangoon to the Japanese, the Calcutta-Howrah conurbation was a vital harbor, logistical base, and manufacturing center. Bombay likewise sustained operations in the Middle East and East Africa. Bengali peasants might be allowed to starve, but the rationing system in vital areas had to be supported with cereals from the Panjab. Delivering these placed an immense strain on the human and economic resources of the province. The Unionist political machine—built

⁸⁷ Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, 154–155.

⁸⁸ Barrier, *The Punjab Alienation of Land Bill of 1900*, 94, 95.

⁸⁹ These two paragraphs draw heavily from Barrier, *Punjab Alienation of Land Bill*, and Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1847–1947* (Delhi: Manohar, 1988), Chapters 4 through 6.

on the support of precisely the rural classes that now suffered from both shortages and food requisitioning—came under intolerable stress.

As the Japanese advanced into eastern India and millions starved in Bengal, the viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, wrote to the governor of Panjab that

procurement of the necessary surplus wheat from the Punjab is more important than any political considerations, any interests of the ministers and in the last resort, the continuance of Provincial Autonomy in the Punjab.⁹⁰

Incumbency on such terms was a burden that broke the Unionist Party, already weakened as its mediatory politics of patronage were disturbed by the party's lack of "indigenous cultural foundation for the state's power."⁹¹ The Muslim League, unburdened with provincial office, was able to make headway in the rural Panjab and wean away many of the rural worthies and holy men who underpinned the political system.⁹² At the same time as it enlisted the beneficiaries of the status quo in Panjab, the League drew on agrarian discontent and Islamic rhetoric to win the common people of Bengal, even if Jinnah preferred to use patrician Muslims as his representatives there. Bengali Muslim votes were merely a make-weight.⁹³ The highly militarized Panjab was the decisive arena. As the experienced colonial official and editor of Viceroy Wavell's diaries, Penderel Moon observed, it was the rise of communal passion in Panjab that roused fears that the Army might disintegrate and the government of India vanish. This had been a concern as early as 1943 when military intelligence described how reports in the Indian-language press influenced soldiers. One army officer wrote forebodingly that he sometimes felt that "I do not command this battalion: it is commanded by forces in the Punjab."⁹⁴ Panjab agitation in turn culminated in the League's fury at the Unionists patching together a coalition that briefly clung to power until March 1947 when the Governor took charge. A century of military policy had created a British Indian Army "drawn from

⁹⁰ This extremely important document was located by Ian Talbot and provides the epigraph to his Chapter 7, "The Unionist Party in Decline", *Punjab*, 142.

⁹¹ Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, 188.

⁹² This argument is based on Talbot, *Punjab*, Chapters 7 and 8, and Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, Chapter 6.

⁹³ Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* revised edition (London: Charles Hurst, 2005), 87–90; Taj-ul Islam Hashmi, "The Communalization of Class Struggle: The East Bengal Peasantry 1923–1929," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* XXV (1988): 171–204. A few companies of troops controlled the great Calcutta riots of 1946; this would have been impossible in the veteran-heavy Panjab.

⁹⁴ Cited in Indivar Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance: State and Class in India 1939–1945," *Past and Present* No. 176 (2002): 192.

just those areas and races of northern India in which communal passion was at its height." This, Moon explains, is what forced the Government of India to rush into partition in mid-1947.⁹⁵ Nor should this be disregarded as a retrospective apologia by a retired civil servant. It was quite visible at the time. On March 19, 1947, the well-informed Philips Talbot wrote a long memorandum on the situation in India. The government of India, he wrote, was critically depleted of reliable personnel at the field level. Up to 1942, the Viceroy and Governors could enforce any policy even if opposed by the major political parties in India. But now Talbot was personally told by one provincial governor that this would be practically impossible, and he heard that the Viceroy shared that opinion.⁹⁶ Three years earlier Winston Churchill had suggested reducing the size of the Indian Army for fear of such consequences to come.⁹⁷ As Eric Stokes wrote of 1857, in "fragile military despotisms, a mutiny of the army predicated political revolution."⁹⁸ Signs of such an event were not lacking in 1945–1946. So a swift settlement that allowed Britain's withdrawal was essential. The failure of the two major parties to agree then made some kind of partition of British India inevitable.

It is worth noting however, that once the plebiscitary enthusiasm of 1946–1947 and intense passions that fed religious violence had somewhat subsided, the old colonial structures of authority re-emerged in Pakistan. The Muslims of Bengal had cast their ballots and could now be returned to the political and military inconsequence whence they had briefly emerged. West Pakistan and especially the Panjab became the dominant partner in the new dispensation.⁹⁹ The British regime had given Panjab and the Panjabis pride of place in its military structure, and as the army emerged as the sole stable institution in the postcolonial Pakistani state, Panjab naturally acquired an unprecedented dominance in the new Pakistani state. The dictatorship of Ayub Khan, (1958–1969) then sought to manage the country as the British had managed Panjab, by drawing on and privileging the locally

⁹⁵ Penderel Moon, *Divide and Quit: An Eyewitness Account of the Partition of India* [1961] new edition, in *The Partition Omnibus*, Mushirul Hasan, ed. (Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2002), 278–279.

⁹⁶ Phillips Talbot, *An American Witness to India's Partition* with a foreword by B.R. Nanda (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007), 217.

⁹⁷ Kamtekar, "A Different War Dance", 192–193.

⁹⁸ Stokes, *The Peasant Armed*, 15.

⁹⁹ See Ian Talbot, "The Punjabization of Pakistan: Myth or Reality?" in *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?* Christophe Jaffrelot, ed. (New Delhi: Manohar for Centres de Sciences Humaines, 2002), Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

powerful. They were now dubbed Basic Democrats and elected throughout the country. Saghir Ahmad, a sociologist who studied the process at work in rural Panjab, remarked how landlords controlled the election behind the scenes through pliable candidates. The 1964 elections were keenly contested, and in rural Panjab, factional fights followed a well-established pattern of factional rivalry among rural landowners who dragooned their dependents into the electoral process.¹⁰⁰ Ayub Khan like Lords Canning and Curzon before him, sought out the 'natural leaders', men "whose influence in their own localities could be substantial." In West Pakistan, these landlord chieftains, like their forebears, were big landowners functioning as tribal heads. In East Pakistan, Feldman described how Ayub's manager Monem Khan put both official power and personal patronage into the hands of new-minted potentates who, however, had no hold on local society.

The management of the Rural Works Programme was largely in their hands and many other forms of small patronage, allied to the exercise of minor administrative functions enabled these people, especially in East Pakistan, to oppress the poor, to secure all kinds of unfair advantage, and, of course, to enrich themselves. It is for this reason that when in East Pakistan violence became rife in the cold weather of 1968–1969, violence took a specific turn against these rural Caligulas, some whom were brutally murdered.¹⁰¹

That turmoil culminated in the first nation-wide election ever held in Pakistan. The Army's refusal to accept the result ultimately led to the separation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Meanwhile, in the early twenty-first century, 'tribes' headed by councils of landlord chiefs still gather in parts of rural Pakistan to settle disputes, assert tribal dominance, and hand out rough justice. The system of judgments by councils of elders in the presence of the assembled tribesmen (or *jirga* and *faislo* adjudication) is vigorously alive in Pakistan and also able to ignore or co-opt the official judicial and penal system. In 2002, an Amnesty International report on Pakistan described how tribal gatherings,

consisting of elders of the tribe and headed by the *sardar* [tribal chieftain] or, if the dispute is of less importance, local heads of the tribe, can either be called on an *ad hoc* basis or take place regularly. They deal with a range of issues, including conflicting claims to land and water, inheritance, alleged breaches of the 'honour' code and intra-tribal or inter-tribal killings.

¹⁰⁰ Saghir Ahmad, *Class and Power in a Punjabi Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 95, 103.

¹⁰¹ Herbert Feldman, *From Crisis to Crisis: Pakistan 1962–1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 14–31.

Penalties invoked by the tribal councils included sexual assault as punishment for 'lower tribe' members who were perceived to challenge the locally dominant tribe. In another instance, on 28 December 1998 a *jirga* was held at Khairpur Circuit House in Sind attended by the chiefs and elders of the Bhutto and Jamali tribes together with "the Deputy Commissioner of Khairpur to resolve a conflict that had resulted in four murders within five months."¹⁰²

Votes and Violence—India of the Congress

In India, power was often violently sought but force was entwined with the electoral process. The latter imposed its own strategic imperatives. The common pattern of ethnicization is well illustrated in Ghanshyam Shah's meticulous study of Gujarat. He found that from the first decade of the twentieth century previously unknown caste councils and organizations were formed among the hierarchical Rajputs as a response to the decay of aristocratic leadership. Then in the late 1930s, Natvarsingh Solanki, an enterprising Rajput politician, noted the huge majority with which a (lower-caste) Koli had won the Kaira seat in the 1937 elections. This was the period when Kolis also sought Rajput status. He began making overtures to the community and in 1942 was able to mobilize large numbers of them, together with Rajputs, in a 'Kshatriya' rally against the Congress, which was dominated by Patidar peasants. In November 1947, this culminated in the formation of a regional 'Kshatriya' organization that incorporated Kolis and herdsmen (Rabaris) and also reached out to Bhil and Chodhra tribals. But this was resented by some of the old gentry Rajputs, and they organized a separate 'pure' Rajput organization. Nonetheless, the new 'Kshatriya' identity took root for political purposes, especially as land reform made many Koli tenants into independent proprietors. A Rajput informant explained the changed situation that required the alliance with them. "In the new political system we lost land, property and privileges. Now we can get importance only through our numerical force."¹⁰³ This, indeed, was to be the

¹⁰² *Jirgas* worked as dominant caste councils. One attracted world-wide attention in 2002 when it condemned a 'lower-tribe' woman to sexual assault. Amnesty International, *Pakistan: The Tribal Justice System* (August 2002), AI Index: ASA 33/024/2002, 1–17. For a similar north Indian case see *Frontline* <http://www.frontline.in/social/indomitable-spirit/article4521658.ece> (downloaded June 17, 2013).

¹⁰³ Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ghanshyam Shah, *Caste Association and*

pattern in the new India. Boundaries between maximal communities were extended, or even invented for political purposes, while marriage alliances continued to operate on a narrower strategic basis. New social blocs—such as the Gujarat Kshatriyas, were soon captured by the dominant Congress which for some decades ruled by dint of the famous ‘KHAM’ coalition.¹⁰⁴

This generally successful effort had two components—the growing presence of prosperous rural groups and castes in Congress and the acceptance of a federal structure by the Congress leadership. That framework allowed the party to function as an umbrella organization with political conflicts manifesting themselves as struggles for control of the Congress organization.¹⁰⁵ The struggle to sustain popular support against rivals who were often backed by the colonial state had also forced the intelligentsia to actualize this democratic framework in practice. They did not have the option of coercing support. This strategy for gaining support required the Congress to fit itself into the local structures of power and to change as those changed with wider patterns of political mobilization. That tradition allowed it to make a radical leap of faith in the new Constitution and introduce universal adult suffrage.¹⁰⁶ As James Manor observed, before 1967 only one informal institution, “the Congress Party’s cluster of regional political ‘machines’—possessed the substance and the reach to manage most of the social tensions that arose.”¹⁰⁷

Multiple crises in 1966–1967 strained this apparatus to breaking point. For a decade or so, it was reconstituted on a more centralized, plebiscitary model by Indira Gandhi.¹⁰⁸ This in turn, created what Kanchan Chandra has described as a representational blockage within the organization. Emerging

Political Process in Gujarat: A Study of the Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975), 33–54 quote 45.

¹⁰⁴ This acronym stood for the electoral bloc formed by Madhavsingh Solanki—‘Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi, Muslim’.

¹⁰⁵ Myron Weiner, *The Politics of Scarcity: Public Pressure and Political Response in India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 63. He noted that efforts were made “to nominate candidates of important local castes and religions or tribal groups.” Ibid. By contrast, Talbot observes, the Muslim League blocked efforts at widening its membership and Jinnah preferred unelected and therefore pliable leaders in East Bengal where the majority of Pakistanis lived. *Pakistan: A Modern History*, 90–93.

¹⁰⁶ Sumit Sarkar, “Indian Democracy: The Historical Inheritance,” 23–46 in *The Success of India’s Democracy*, Atul Kohli ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁷ Robert L. Hardgrave, *India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), 104–110; James Manor, “Center-State Relations,” in *India’s Democracy* Kohli ed., 79.

¹⁰⁸ For a well documented study of this phase see Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 417–419.

social blocs that would earlier have worked to seize power within it now turned to independent organization and, if they were small, sought to exert leverage by means of the coalition building that followed the decline of Congress hegemony.¹⁰⁹ Its rival, the BJP, was able to widen its base in the early 1990s by recruiting elites from Hindu castes it had previously excluded. But it could only accommodate them at lower levels of the organization.¹¹⁰ That representational blockage then created an opening for a new ethnic party, the Bahujan Samaj Party, which draws its core support from the Dalits of north India. It successfully displaced both the old-established Congress and the Hindu nationalist BJP in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India.¹¹¹

This growing political participation of groups that previously had not organized for their own interests has, however, focused on power at higher levels of governance. Both the centralization of fiscal resources at the state and central government levels and the communication revolution encouraged this. Yet the nationalist intelligentsia within and without the Congress, both before and after Independence, also believed in the value of 'traditional' institutions at the village and village-cluster level. Nonetheless, twentieth-century efforts to revive local organization, whether through District and Local Boards in the late colonial period or via Community Development and Panchayati Raj in independent India had limited success. Developments since the 1950s were reviewed in 1978; it was found that local institutions (under various names) covered much of the country, but often existed only in name. It is perhaps not coincidental that they were most effective in the states located in peninsular India, where local organizations had historically been most coherent. But centuries of centralization were not easily reversed. The inquiry found that local bodies were everywhere enfeebled by the "lukewarm attitude of the political elite" that was not enthusiastic about reducing its own power and patronage.¹¹²

The Congress system always rested on a tacit compromise with the locally dominant. The deepening of competitive politics in India gradually made this arrangement less and less viable.¹¹³ The power to use covert violence

¹⁰⁹ Chandra, *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed*, 250–254.

¹¹⁰ Chandra, *ibid.*, 268.

¹¹¹ "Mayawati Takes Uttar Pradesh," *Hindu* online edition, accessed May 12, 2007.

¹¹² *Report of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions* (New Delhi: Government of India Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, 1978), 6.

¹¹³ This was noted by the contributors to a symposium in the *Journal of Asian Studies* edited by Ashutosh Varshney under the title "Is India Becoming More Democratic?" vol. 59 (2000), 3–108.

shrank visibly as the explosion of print and electronic media made concealment difficult across the subcontinent (and the rest of the world). Renewed and increasingly politicized ethnic groups are more visible in both India and Pakistan. In northwest India, as early as the 1980s, for example, councils of clan delegates met regularly and showed impressive power to mobilize tens of thousands around various issues. 'Traditional' councils were used for agrarian goals—such as agricultural support prices and electricity for farm operations.¹¹⁴ The parallel disintegration of hierarchy is exemplified by the fact that there were in the 1990s about a thousand cases pending in law-courts by communities seeking to 'down-grade themselves' and claim either Scheduled Tribe or Scheduled Caste status. Furthermore, modern legal and political strategies were employed to mobilize around innovative new ethnic boundaries.¹¹⁵ The rise of ethnic parties also emboldened other 'neo-primordial' organizations to make larger claims to authority. Elected office-holders instinctively avoid criticizing them.¹¹⁶ Like the Pakistani *jirgas*, community organizations of dominant peasants (*khāps*) in parts of north India ran parallel judicial systems, awarding sentences of exile or death within a few miles of India's capital. In earlier decades this would be done by stealth. In the past decade, it became more open and unabashed until the central government and judiciary felt obliged to intervene. On the defensive after India's Supreme Court directed the executive branch to act against them, the leadership now disclaimed 'honor killing' but demanded recognition for their organizations as well as a reserved quota for the Jat ethnic group.¹¹⁷ New ethnic organizations are thus participants in political processes alongside formal parties and demand-based movements. The rise of neo-tribalism that can result is illustrated by the case of the members of the Gujar or Gur-

¹¹⁴ Dipankar Gupta, *Rivalry and Brotherhood*, 8–19.

¹¹⁵ Sundar, "Caste as Census Category: Implications for Sociology" 117–23. This would allow the newly re-shaped communities access to special programs intended for the disadvantaged. Status is disregarded for socio-economic gain.

¹¹⁶ The Chief Minister of U.P. state refused to even comment on a ruling: responding to a reporter he said that it "was for the media to debate." <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/akhilesh-yadav-refuses-to-slam-khap-panchayat-diktat-says-nothing-wrong/975219/> (July 17, 2012; downloaded January 10, 2013).

¹¹⁷ Leaders of these bodies then asked the Court to review its decision. It also decided to agitate for recognition of their role in the 'uplift of society,' and called a rally in New Delhi. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/khap-panchayats-to-file-review-petition-against-sc-order/780942/> (April 25, 2011; downloaded January 10, 2013). Finally, at the end of 2011, the Home Ministry had to remind state governments that they should enforce the law on crime against women including "so-called 'honour killings'". <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/khap-panchayats-have-no-legal-status-govt/882881/> (December 1, 2011; downloaded January 10, 2013).

jara caste cluster of north India. This name has historically been applied to many distinct endogamous peasant communities across north India that shared only a loose tradition of pastoralism and an ancient name. But the rising competition for recognition and preferential employment led them to launch a violent agitation to demand their reclassification as a Scheduled Tribe with access to the 7.5 percent quota in government employment and admission to educational institutions constitutionally allotted for that category. Road and rail transport in north-central India was intermittently disrupted for some months before a compromise was worked out.¹¹⁸ The territorial range of the Gujars in the state of Rajasthan overlapped with that of the equally militant Minas who had obtained listing as a Scheduled Tribe some decades ago. The Minas were shrewd enough to realize the undesirability of having more competitors for a fixed quota. The ethnic logic of collective reprisal was brought into action. Isolated Gujar villages were blockaded by armed Minas who threatened to drive them all off the land if the government of Rajasthan made any concessions to the community.¹¹⁹ This was a straightforward clash of ethnic blocs over resources. Ironically, the agitators for a 'primitive, backward' identity used mobile phone networks to coordinate and exchange information. The mobilization possible with new transport and communication networks has made such macro-caste blocs especially important politically. That in turn results in political cooptation as well as the exploitation of factional conflict within the bloc incorporating it into the structures of coalition and patronage.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "The Dausa Effect," *Indian Express* online, May 31, 2007 (<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/the-dausa-effect/32281/> downloaded April 17, 2013).

¹¹⁹ A reporter for the *Indian Express* headlined his report: "Meenas lay siege in Dausa", Sreenivas Jandyala, Posted online: Monday, June 04, 2007 at 0000 hrs. (<http://expressindia.indianexpress.com/news/fullstory.php?newsid=87602>, downloaded April 17, 2007).

¹²⁰ Myron Weiner, "The Struggle for Equality: Caste in Indian Politics" *India's Democracy*, in Kohli ed., 196–198.

AFTERWORD

In the prologue to this book, I proposed to understand the long history of 'caste' (including 'tribe') by defining it as a bounded social group defined by the exercise of power throughout its millennial history. I also argued that various strands of social organization uniquely coincided at this boundary. I then essayed to address the changes it underwent under the impact of modernity. Where then does the institution stand at present? At the end of the twentieth century the veteran political scientist Myron Weiner wrote that caste in India had shown itself a much more potent form of social identity than class. It had been delegitimized as ideology without its powerful presence as a political identity being undermined thereby. In the 1990s it was yet "more salient as a political identity, and as an institutionalized element of civil society".¹ Similarly D.L. Sheth, working from long experience with field research, made a stronger argument: hierarchies were breaking down, and older, smaller, geographically narrower castes were fusing into "relatively loose and open-ended entities" that competed for political power and economic and cultural resources.² In other words, caste's religious strand has frayed away but the one binding it to the exercise of power is thicker than ever.³ It has also maintained itself across political and religious boundaries, encompassing all the major faiths and all the five countries of South Asia. More than ever, it can only be understood in terms of the ethnic boundary processes that I invoked in the Introduction. Political needs have led to

¹ Weiner, "The Struggle for Equality: Caste in Indian Politics," 200, 220.

² D.L. Sheth, "Caste and Class: Social Reality and Political Aspirations," in *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, Ghanshyam Shah ed. (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 213–221.

³ I remember in the mid-1980s a firm named "Jain Shudh Vanaspati" was found to have imported large amounts of beef tallow that it sold to many margarine ('vanaspati') manufacturers across India to adulterate their pure, vegetarian product. They were prosecuted and the matter forgotten. If purity had been a concern in modern neo-Hindu politics, it should have been vastly more important than the anti-Muslim mobilization around the Ayodhya mosque. But as is well-known personal purity was completely overshadowed by adversarial ethnic mobilization, preservation of purity by pursuit of power. More recently, the recent chief of the cow protection wing of the extreme Hindu nationalist and violently anti-Muslim Bajrang Dal was found to be engaged in the illegal sale of cows for slaughter(!).

Indian Express online, January 14, 2013. <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/bjp-member-held-under-anticow-slaughter-law-in-madhya-pradesh/1059028/>.

amalgamation, with formerly solid boundaries dissolving to include neighboring groups. Boundaries also intersect and cross-cut. It is a truism that no person has a single exclusive identity—least of all if that person lives in South Asia. Analysts have commented on the speed with which one passionately felt identity is dropped and another espoused with equal passion.⁴ These processes existed long before British imperial rule exploited growing networks of communication to shape a new kind of global empire. That empire intensified communication and created the possibility of meaningful political action on vaster scales. Through the twentieth century, these possibilities were exploited by emerging national projects to (ultimately) create Indian, Pakistani and other national identities (another kind of boundary). But the new networks never fully subordinated the kaleidoscopic chaos of the old ones; the new national projects drew upon the need and desire of corporate groups in local society to gain access to the state machinery. National identity was thus layered onto the others and was, like them, contingently adopted, even if with sometimes sacrificial passion.

The promises of modernity and nationalism additionally generated the new ideology of development across the Third World. Its widespread adoption drove a massive enlargement of the power and resources controlled by the state. The failure of developmentalism to deliver on its ambitious promises led to a scramble for whatever was to be had. That manifested itself in the paradox observed by S.S. Jodhka: caste was institutionally much stronger in the 1950s and 1960s, but its presence in public discourse was much less evident than it is today.⁵ The groups mobilizing for this political competition were not ‘primordial’—they had, in fact, reshaped themselves in the pursuit of power in the wider public sphere of the newly independent countries. Hierarchies were flattened in order to create effective, integrated pressure groups. Numbers counted now, especially where electoral processes were a gateway to power. Rajni Kothari observed the process at work half a century ago: “casteism in politics” was nothing other than the “politicisation of caste.” He wrote that this was “something in which the forms of caste and the forms of politics are brought nearer each other, in the process changing both.”⁶ This book has argued that such processes have a millennial past in South Asia: we cannot understand caste without under-

⁴ Gupta, *Caged Phoenix*, 204–206; James Manor, Prologue to second edition of *Caste in Indian Politics*, Kothari ed. (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010), xxiv.

⁵ Surinder S. Jodhka, “The Problem,” *Seminar* No. 633, (May 2012): 13.

⁶ Kothari’s Introduction to *Caste in Indian Politics*, 4–5.

standing the political structures in which it was always lodged, its political economy or 'materiality' as James Manor has termed it.⁷

For millennia, direct communication was face to face, and the reach of identity was bounded by the limits of communication. Political systems built themselves around that fact. Early stratified societies were built by enforcing the coincidence of social and political boundaries within narrow regions. Kingdoms used these as bricks in their political systems. But the fragility of early states allowed the periodic emergence of tribal war-bands that renewed the autonomy of clan territories. The growing reach of the early modern and modern state gradually dissolved some coincident boundaries and carved new, cross-cutting ones. The process has continued, even accelerated with the communication revolutions from the nineteenth century to the present. Ethnic mobilization now occurs by cell-phone.⁸ New lines have been added to the palimpsest of South Asian identities without completely erasing the old. This book has argued that we need to abandon the futile search for a social essence, for the Indic avatara of Hegel's absolute spirit. It has shown that social structures old and new, have been politically ordered in ways that we cannot grasp unless we deploy the concept of caste or tribe as a bounded corporate body shaped by sociopolitical power from its beginnings.

⁷ James Manor, "Prologue," to *Caste in Indian Politics*, xxii–xxiii; see also his essay "Accommodation and Conflict", *Seminar* 633, 14–20.

⁸ See Chapter 6, p. 209.

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